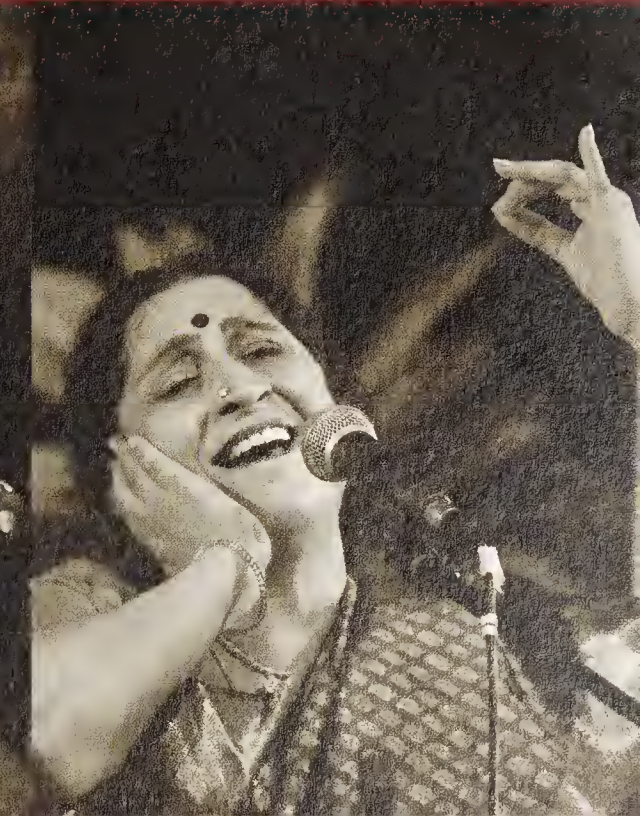
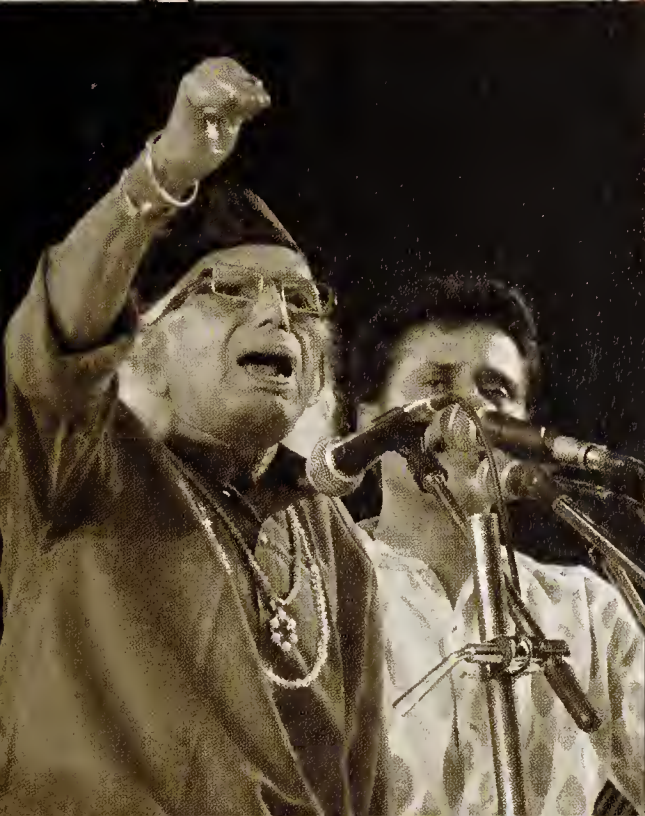


INDRA DHANUSH

RASHTRAPATI BHAVAN - NEW DELHI



INDRA DHANUSH



INDRA DHANUSH: An Ode to India's Timeless Cultural Heritage 2012-2014

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INDRA DHANUSH

Music · Dance · Cinema · Theatre

Rashtrapati Bhavan


New Delhi

S Kalidas (ed.)

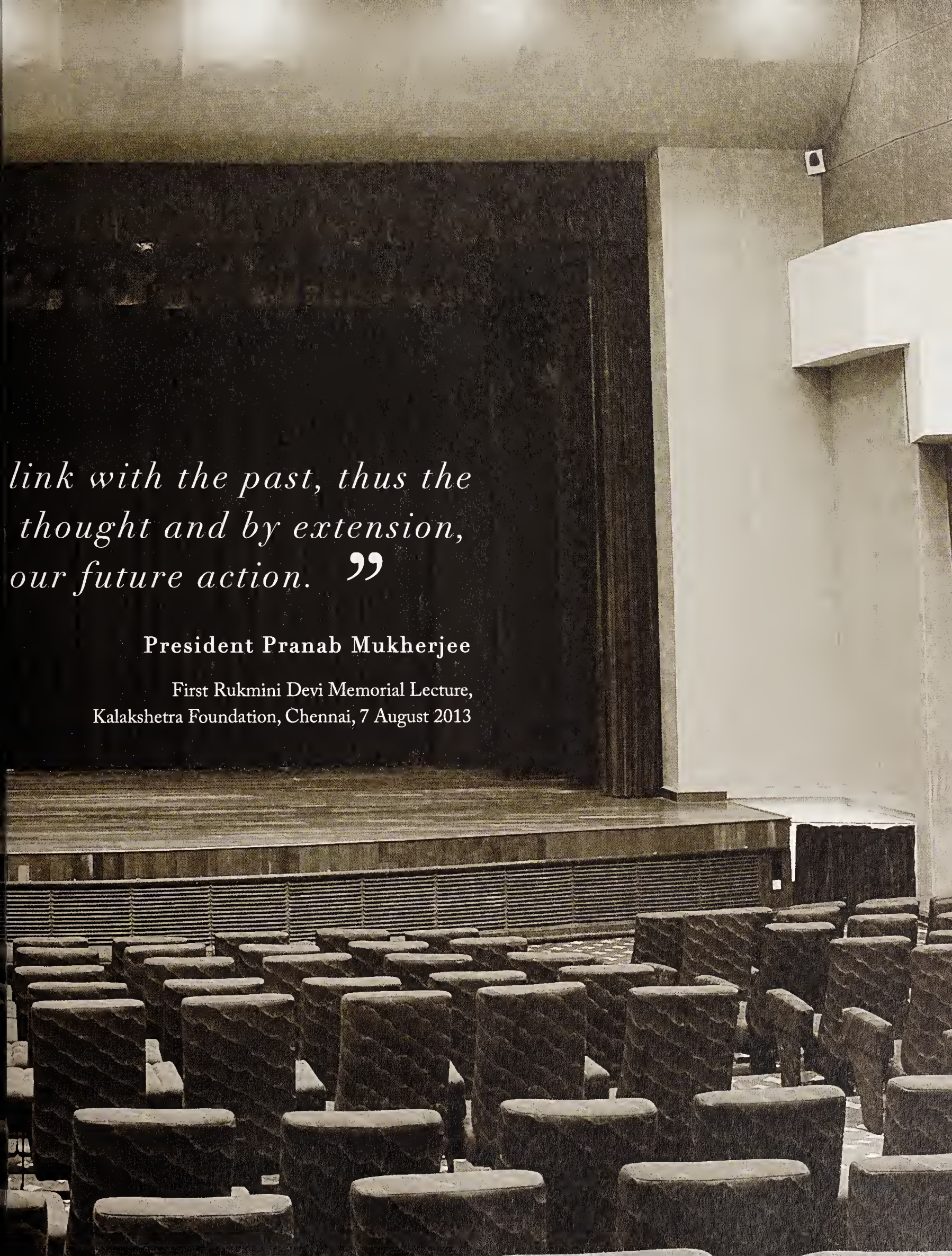
CONTENTS

IX	FOREWORD	Hon'ble President Pranab Mukherjee
X	PREFACE: <i>Not a Presidential Palace but a Peoples' Heritage</i>	Omita Paul
01	INTRODUCTION: <i>The Performing Arts at Rashtrapati Bhavan</i>	Siddharth Sharma
13	MUSIC, MODERNITY, NATIONHOOD: <i>Raga Sangeet in North India</i>	S. Kalidas
	INDRA DHANUSH MUSIC EVENTS	Kuldeep Kumar
25	SHUBHA MUDGAL: <i>Versatile Genius</i>	
31	HARIPRASAD CHAURASIA: <i>Virtuoso Flautist</i>	
37	AO NAGA CHOIR: <i>Dedicated to Hymns</i>	
41	WARSI BROTHERS: <i>The Call of the Mystics</i>	
47	GIRIJA DEVI: <i>The Essence of Banaras</i>	
53	ARUNA SAIRAM: <i>Committed Innovator</i>	
57	BHUVANESH KOMKALI: <i>To Music Born</i>	
61	SHEKHAR SEN: <i>The Actor Singer</i>	
65	ABDUL RASHID KHAN: <i>Musical Miracle</i>	
69	SHIV KUMAR SHARMA: <i>Master of a Hundred Strings</i>	
75	SHILLONG CHAMBER CHOIR: <i>Versatile Voices</i>	
79	SHAHID PARVEZ KHAN: <i>A Chip off the Old Block</i>	

85	SEEKING INDEPENDENCE, DISCOVERING DANCE	Leela Venkataraman
	INDRA DHANUSH DANCE EVENTS	Leela Venkataraman
93	SHRI RAM: <i>The Evergreen Epic</i>	
97	MADHAVI MUDGAL: <i>Odissi Elegance</i>	
103	KARNA: <i>Fortune's Discarded Child</i>	
107	GITANJALI TROUPE: <i>Celebrating Tagore</i>	Sharmishtha Mukherjee
113	KAPILA VENU: <i>The Rare Art of Kutiyattam</i>	Leela Venkataraman
119	VISVA PARICHAY: <i>Poetics of Science</i>	Shambwaditya Ghosh
125	INDIAN CINEMA: <i>A Fantastic Reality</i>	Saibal Chatterjee
	INDRA DHANUSH CINEMA EVENTS	Saibal Chatterjee
131	LINCOLN: <i>Heroic yet Human</i>	
133	MANDELA: <i>Cinematic Epic</i>	
139	INDRA DHANUSH EVENTS CALENDAR 2012 -2014	
143	CONTRIBUTORS	
146	PHOTO CREDITS	



“ *Our classical arts are our
foundation for our current
the platform for*



*link with the past, thus the
thought and by extension,
our future action. ”*

President Pranab Mukherjee

First Rukmini Devi Memorial Lecture,
Kalakshetra Foundation, Chennai, 7 August 2013





**PRESIDENT
REPUBLIC OF INDIA**

FOREWORD

Indra Dhanush, our in-house cultural series, seeks to showcase the richness and magnificence of Indian art and culture. It is an ode to a timeless and treasured cultural legacy, representing both continuity and change. Conceptualised for the first time in the year 2002, it has now been given a new dimension and a more concrete structure and form with its own distinctive logo. Our national bird – the peacock – which now symbolises Indra Dhanush represents, in the true sense, the diversity, uniqueness and brilliance of India's performing arts and music.

Indra Dhanush to us at Rashtrapati Bhavan represents a way of life – through it we seek to present and preserve India's cultural heritage dating back several millennia. This initiative not only enables distinguished performers and artistes to exhibit their body of work, it also gives both connoisseurs and the general public an opportunity to partake their brilliance.

I have been privileged to play host to a galaxy of maestros over the last two years. They have uplifted our souls and enriched our living experience with a display of perhaps the finest music and dance performances anywhere in the world. From the iconic Ramayana, to the mellifluous strains of Paudit Hariprasad Chaurasia's bansuri, to the rare and ancient art form of kutiyattam, recognised by UNESCO as part of the world's intangible oral heritage, Rashtrapati Bhavan has since August 2012 witnessed an array of memorable performances. I am delighted that these are being captured and documented for posterity in the first volume of the multi-volume series on Rashtrapati Bhavan, titled Indra Dhanush.

I wish the volume and the series well.

(Pranab Mukherjee)

20 July 2014

PREFACE:

Not a Presidential Palace but a Peoples' Heritage

The term of the current Presidency started on 25 July 2012. The Hon'ble President had, at that time, conveyed that over the next five years, he would like to build on and take forward the contributions of each of his predecessors in placing Rashtrapati Bhavan at the centre stage of India's socio-political landscape. Another priority for him was to demystify Rashtrapati Bhavan in the eyes of the general public. The idea was to make them experience it not as a Presidential Palace but as an inalienable part of their history and culture.

Various steps have since been initiated to preserve the rich historical, cultural and social legacy of Rashtrapati Bhavan. There has been a concerted effort towards increased public outreach and bringing Rashtrapati Bhavan, and its functioning, closer to the public. Thus, while on the one hand, Rashtrapati Bhavan has been opened for public access on three days of the week and the visiting hours extended, on the other, steps are being taken to conserve and restore this monument as a living heritage and as an inextricable part of Indian history. An important initiative has been the preparation of a Comprehensive Conservation Management Plan (CCMP) by the Indian National Trust for Arts and Cultural Heritage (INTACH), to lay the blueprint for future interventions in the President's Estate.

FACING PAGE: The President wants to demystify Rashtrapati Bhavan in the eyes of the general public. The idea is to make them experience it not as a Presidential Palace but as an inalienable part of their history



Continuing with this line of thought, as enunciated by the President, a need was also felt for authentic documentation of various facets of Rashtrapati Bhavan seamlessly interwoven into one another. It was felt that while, at present, there are several stand-alone publications on Rashtrapati Bhavan, there is no authentic, officially documented narrative with an underlying, unifying theme and perspective. In that context, it was decided to commission a multi-volume series on various aspects of this one-of-its kind monument, in collaboration with the Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts (IGNCA). The present volume on cultural life and performances in Rashtrapati Bhavan, titled *Indra Dhanush*, is the first in the series which shall comprise, amongst others, volumes on the President's Bodyguard, Presidential Retreats, Landscape and Architecture, Interiors and Artworks, Kitchens, Dining and Entertaining and Flora and Fauna. Demographically, India today is one of the youngest countries in the world and recognising this, there is going to be an illustrated children's book, as part of this series, for our future generations. The entire series will adopt a thematic and interdisciplinary approach with a view to relating all parts to the whole.

I would also emphasise that Rashtrapati Bhavan is at the centre of a diverse heritage. It is one of the greatest architectural landmarks of the modern era, with a unique synthesis of eastern and western influences. It represents a historical setting in the establishment of modern South Asian nations and is a meeting ground for Heads of State and other

dignitaries. As the office-cum-residence of the Head of the Indian State, it is a venue par excellence for State functions and ceremonies. A site with landscaped gardens, great bio-diversity and a rich cultural tradition, this architectural masterpiece has a legacy which promises to be both a researcher's and storyteller's delight. I have no doubt that as these volumes unfold over the next three years, they will substantially enrich our understanding of Indian history and public life.

Indra Dhanush, our in-house cultural series, embodies the concept of India's cultural heritage being presented before the Head of State in his role, albeit informal, as the patron of arts and culture. The present volume is a compendium of music, dance and cinematic events organised at Rashtrapati Bhavan since August 2012. Through Indra Dhanush we seek to present maestros of various art forms every month. Music, dance and cinema play a definitive part in the making of our national identity and Rashtrapati Bhavan has been a great meeting point for musicians, dancers and filmmakers to showcase their works.

The President had launched in December 2013 a Writers and Artists in-Residence initiative to welcome creative people to Rashtrapati Bhavan and enable them to experience life here. Yishy Doma Bhutia, Dr. Vempalli Gangadhar, Rahool Saxena and Pratap Sudhir Morey are the first set of artists and writers whom we would be welcoming to Rashtrapati Bhavan this September to share, partake and enrich our way of life.

During the course of the current Presidency, we have had the pleasure of hosting performers such as Hari Prasad Chaurasia, Girija Devi, Shiv Kumar Sharma, Abdul Rashid Khan and Shubha Mudgal, to name a few. Their performances have been appreciated by artists, critics and members of the general public alike. There also has been iconic cinema on display by way of screenings of movies such as *Lincoln* and *Mandela—Long Walk to Freedom*. This rich cultural mosaic has



President's Bodyguard with the Mauryan Bull Capital made of polished sandstone



LEFT: Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko of Japan with President Pranab Mukherjee and his daughter Sharmishtha Mukherjee at the Rashtrapati Bhavan; RIGHT: President Mukherjee enjoying a walk in the Mughal Gardens in full bloom

now been documented and contextualised in the present volume, with perceptive essays that trace the development of music, dance and cinema in the context of our national history. It is my earnest desire and hope that this volume, and the others that follow, shall present a vibrant, ringside view of life at Rashtrapati Bhavan.

Omita Paul

Secretary to the President

20 July 2014

Rashtrapati Bhavan, New Delhi

THE PERFORMING ARTS AT RASHTRAPATI BHAVAN:

A Chronicle

Siddharth Sharma

The performing arts have been an integral part of Indian identity and culture. They display amazing depth, richness and diversity, developed over several millennia. Traditionally, these arts found patronage and flourished under enlightened rulers who themselves, at times, were great exponents of music and dance. This role has in modern times, been largely taken over by the State through government funding of art institutions.

THE EARLY YEARS

Successive Indian Presidents, as Heads of the Republic, have encouraged performers and artistes to display their talent and carve out a pan-Indian identity for themselves. Rashtrapati Bhavan's engagement with the performing arts has been both substantive and multi-dimensional. As early as 1949, an Exhibition of Indian Art, jointly organised by the Royal Academy, London, with the cooperation of the Governments of India and the United Kingdom, was brought to India and displayed at the Rashtrapati Bhavan. This event ultimately resulted in the creation of the National Museum that was inaugurated by the then Governor General, C Rajgopalachari, on 15 August 1949.



President Rajendra Prasad and Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru with members of a cultural troupe in 1951

The first President of India, Dr Rajendra Prasad, started the practice of inviting leading musicians and dancers to Rashtrapati Bhavan and honoring them. Among the early musicians so honoured were Omkarnath Thakur, Mushtaq Husain Khan, Nisar Husain Khan, Ravi Shankar, Bismillah Khan, Vilayat Khan and Rukmini Devi, to name a few. As the Head of State, he bestowed the Padma Awards and the Sangeet Natak Akademi (SNA) Awards on artistes every year. After a gap the SNA Awards have been brought back to Rashtrapati Bhavan during the current Presidency.

Sarod maestro Anjad Ali Khan fondly recalls a Padma Awards reception where his father Ustad Haafiz Ali Khan, asked of President Rajendra Prasad to “save raga Darbari”. This disarming entreaty was in response to the President’s query, “*Khan Sahab main aap ke liya kya kar sakta hoon?*” (“Khan Sahab, what can I do for you?”). Anjad Ali Khan further recounts: “My father told Prasad that being the President, you have to look after everything, but you have to preserve and protect the purity of raga Darbari. My father was very happy and he later told my mother very innocently that the President has promised that he will protect raga Darbari.”

Artistes like MS Subbulakshmi, Ravi Shankar and Indrani Rahman were among the early performers to present their art at Rashtrapati Bhavan. Dr Radhakrishnan and Dr Zakir

Husain were particularly interested in the arts and would make it a point to invite musicians and dancers for performances. Bharatanatyam and kuchipudi danseuse Yamini Krishnamurti, kathak diva Uma Sharma, sarod maestro Anjad Ali Khan, veteran vocalist Pandit Jasraj performed at Rashtrapati Bhavan more than once during the 1970s and 80s.

INDRA DHANUSH: THE FIRST COMING

The practice of presenting renowned artistes at Rashtrapati Bhavan received further impetus during President APJ Abdul Kalam's time. The forerunner to the present Indra Dhanush series was flagged off on 27 December 2002 with an hour-long concert by Pandit Jasraj. A galaxy of maestros such as Shiv Kumar Sharma, Anjad Ali Khan, Zakir Hussain, Jagjit Singh, Bombay Jayashri and TM Krishna performed at Rashtrapati Bhavan from 2002 to 2007. The coup d' grace was the performance on 4 March 2006 of the legendary shehnai maestro Bismillah Khan, accompanied by Soma Ghosh. The performance, staged at the beautiful Mughal Gardens, was his last public performance. We lost this incomparable Bharat Ratna shortly after, leaving an unimaginable void in India's cultural space.

INDRA DHANUSH: REVISITED AND REORIENTED

As part of President Pranab Mukherjee's initiative to showcase India's art and culture, the Indra Dhanush series has been revitalised. It now has a new form, structure and a distinctive logo – the peacock – representing the passion and resplendence of India's performing arts. The scope too, has now been extended to include music, dance, cinema and theatre. The President has taken a personal interest in reviving India's rare art forms resulting in the staging of the ancient Sanskrit theatre form of kutiyattam, recognised by UNESCO as part of the world's intangible oral heritage, at Rashtrapati Bhavan.

Over the past two years, Rashtrapati Bhavan has witnessed sublime performances by maestros such as Girija Devi, Hari Prasad Chaurasia, Abdul Rashid Khan, Aruna Sairam and Shubha Mudgal, amongst others. Each of these artistes has left an indelible impression on our minds and elevated our consciousness. As part of our Christmas tradition, we have had incomparable performances by the Shillong Chamber Choir and the Ao Naga Choir. India's timeless epics have been brought to life through Shriram Bhartiya Kala Kendra's renditions of Ramayana and Karna. Another virtuoso performance has been Shekhar Sen's musical mono-act on the life and times of Swami Vivekananda.

Music has long been a unifying thread linking geographical, social, religious and linguistic boundaries. Three bands from three different SAARC countries – Strings

from Pakistan, LRB from Bangladesh and Advaita from India – came together for the first time in Rashtrapati Bhavan on 28 November 2013 for a special performance prior to the South Asian Bands Festival at Purana Quila.

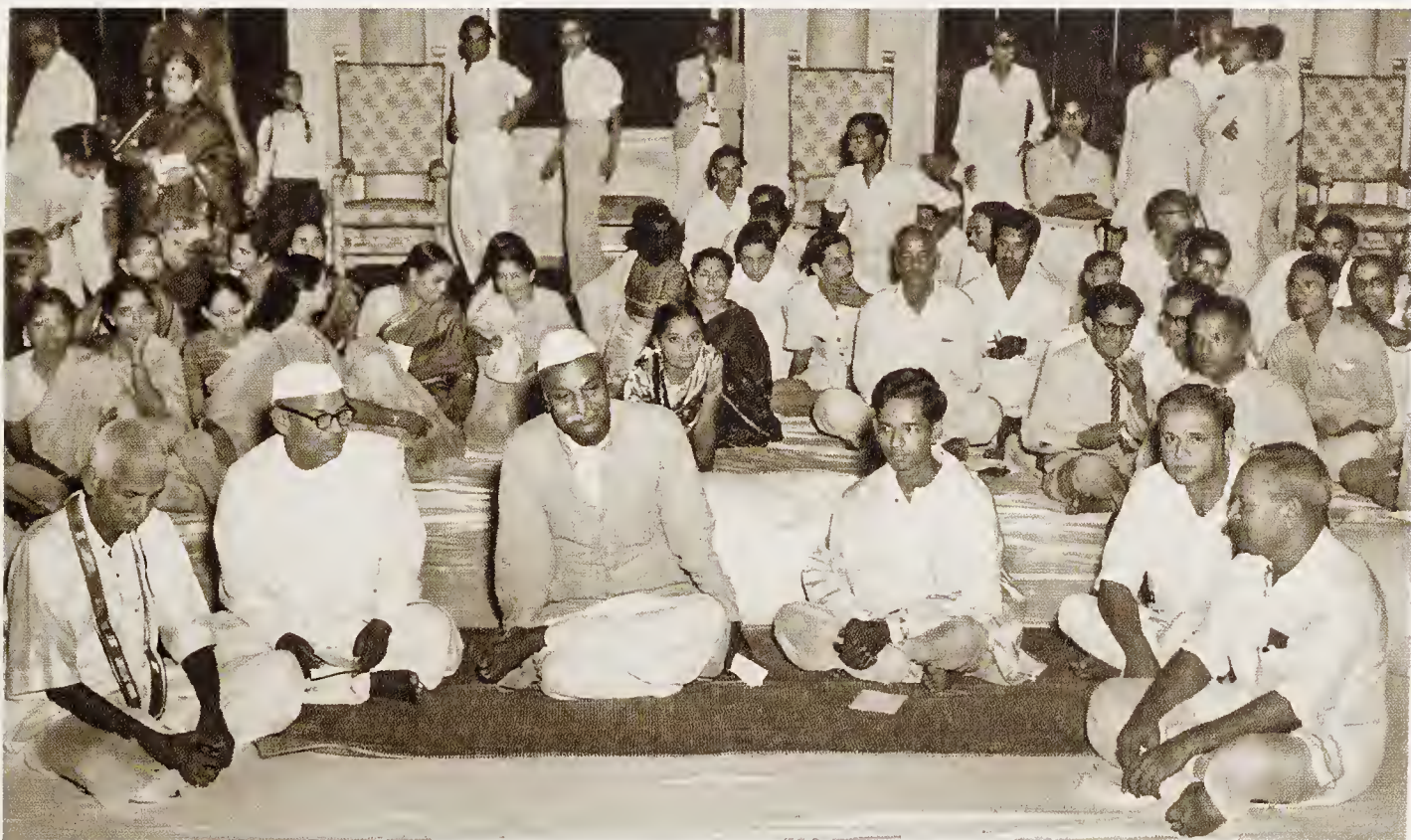
INDIAN AND WORLD CINEMA

Cinema is another art form that Indra Dhanush readily embraced. The Rashtrapati Bhavan auditorium came alive with the screening of the iconic films *Lincoln* and *Mandela – Long Walk to Freedom*. The trials and tribulations faced by these two world statesmen, separated

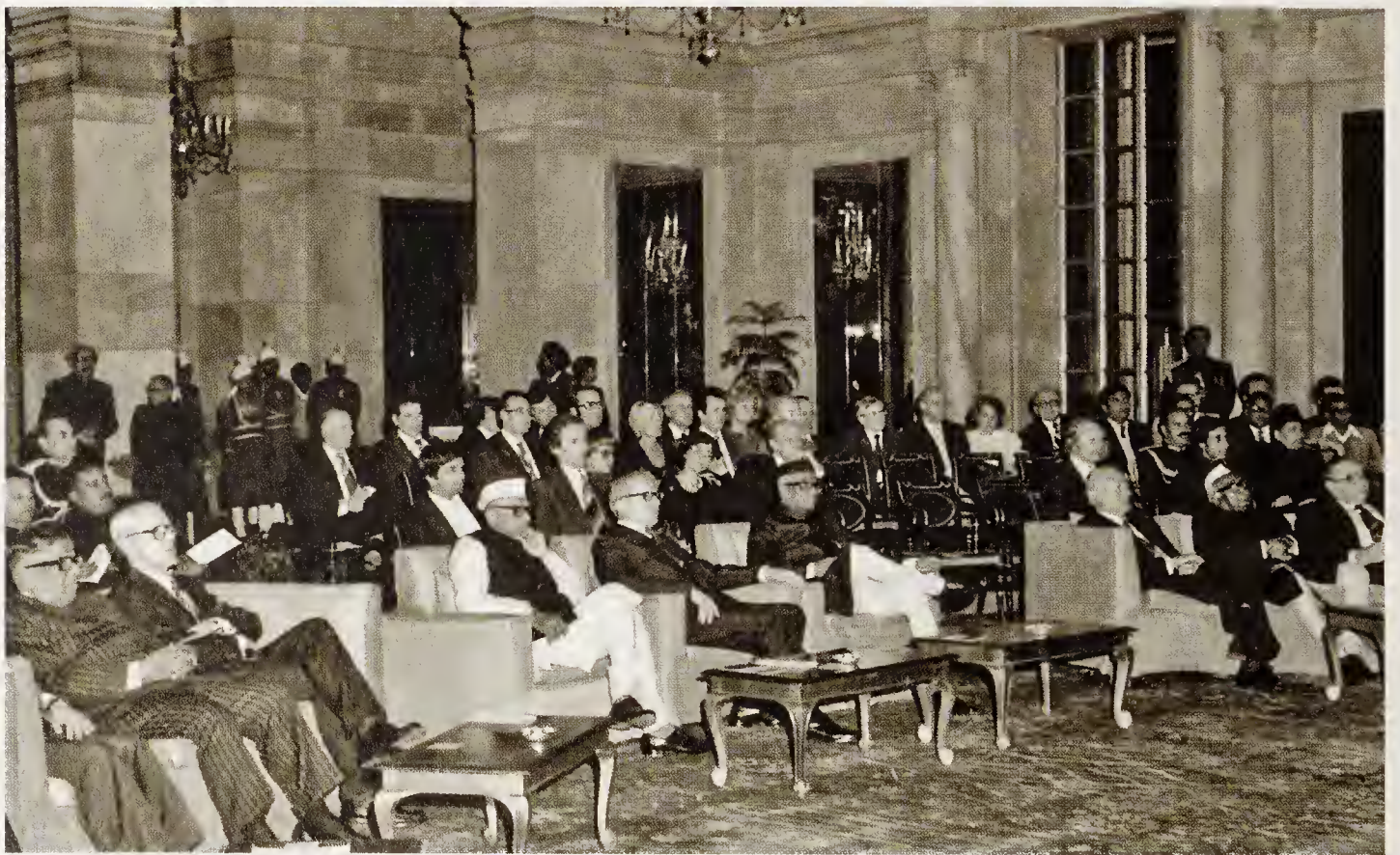
over time and space, but united by the extraordinary leadership and character they displayed in the face of extreme adversity, left hardly any member of audience unmoved. Similarly, in the run up to the General Elections and as part of the President's initiative aimed at furthering voter participation in the electoral process, a special screening of the film *Bhoothnath Returns* was organised. It was attended by Amitabh Bachchan and the rest of the cast and crew.

PROJECTING INDIA

Cultural diplomacy plays an important



President Rajendra Prasad with M Balamuralikrishna



ABOVE: President N Sanjiva Reddy with Mohammed Daoud Khan of Afghanistan greeting folk and classical artistes including Shovana Narayan and Tirathi Ajwani
BELOW: President N Sanjiva Reddy and Prime Minister Morarji Desai with guests at Ashoka Hall

part in our foreign policy. It has thus been a tradition to organise cultural performances as a part of the formal banquets for important Heads of State and visiting dignitaries. Two such notable events in the recent past have been the visits by the US President Barack Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama and the ASEAN-India Commemorative Summit.

President Obama, who was the sixth American President to visit India, and the First Lady were treated to the richness and diversity of Indian culture during their

State visit in November 2010. At the State Banquet hosted by President Pratibha Patil on 8th November, the Obamas were greeted with the traditional bugle and a medley of percussion from across the country at the portico of Rashtrapati Bhavan. An opera piece in Khasi, presented by the Shillong Chamber Choir, provided a perfect start to the evening. It was followed by folk musicians from Rajasthan who teamed up with Indian classical artistes on the sitar, violin, flute and tabla to enthrall the guests. A set of six dancers performed three different forms of classical dance—



Prime Minister Morarji Desai with US President Jimmy Carter and First Lady Rosalynn Carter at Rashtrapati Bhavan with a dance troupe



President Pratibha Devisingh Patil with US President Barack Obama at the State Banquet on 8 November 2010. FACING PAGE: Odissi dance at the State Banquet for President Obama

kathak, bharatnatyam and odissi—to give the American leadership an idea of how diverse and multi-hued Indian culture is.

Very early into the current Presidency, India hosted the ASEAN-India Commemorative Summit in New Delhi in December 2012 to mark the 20th anniversary of the ASEAN-India dialogue partnership and the 10th anniversary of ASEAN-India Summit-level partnership. The Banquet hosted at Rashtrapati

Bhavan for the visiting Heads of State saw a melange of cultural performances drawn from different parts of the country. The dignitaries were welcomed at the Rashtrapati Bhavan forecourt by charkula dancers – veiled women balancing large multi-tiered circular pyramids of 108 lit oil lamps on their heads, dancing to the strains of rasiya, the songs of Lord Krishna. The music performance in the Darbar Hall featured an ensemble comprising the violin, flute, sarod and tabla. At the







Ashoka Hall, been players of the snake charmers' community from Rajasthan clad in colourful turbans and bright attire performed with their beens, thumbas and khanjaris. Dancers from various parts of India and the participating ASEAN nations left the audience spellbound, rounding off a successful diplomatic summit.

PRESIDENT PRANAB MUKHERJEE – THE INDIVIDUAL

It may interest the readers to know that President Pranab Mukherjee, who has had a long and distinguished innings in public life, rarely found the time earlier for watching films or other forms of cultural activity. The Art Theatre at Rashtrapati Bhavan now serves as a venue for cinema viewings and cultural activities for the President and his guests. He is currently savouring contemporary and classical Indian cinema across various genres. He recently witnessed, and greatly enjoyed, the National Award-winning films *Bhaag Milkha Bhaag* and *Jolly LLB*. With a clearly articulated vision of the performing arts, focusing on artist recognition and encouragement, the President is transforming Rashtrapati Bhavan's cultural landscape.

Hon'ble President Pranab Mukherjee greeting dancers from ASEAN countries and India.

MUSIC, MODERNITY, NATIONHOOD:

Raga Sangeet in North India

S. Kalidas

The British colonial takeover of India caused deep disruptions in all aspects of Indian life. Painful, exploitative and humiliating as the experience was, it also brought with it new lifestyles, languages, technologies, methods of education, administration and governance. The making of Modern India begins in this dramatic dynamic that played out between a weakened and fragmented post-Mughal India and the new conquering western imperial power. It is a tribute to our sense of 'Indian-ness' and its innate resilience that we managed to retain – and, where needed, to reform or even reinvent – our traditions to suit the changing times. Simultaneously, we embraced, acquired and then, even excelled in, what western enlightenment, law and polity had to offer. If Raja Ramnohun Roy and Rabindranath Tagore exemplified this early synthesis of the East and West through what has been called the Bengal Renaissance, the origins and growth of our Freedom Movement could be seen as its most subversive political articulation. In the sphere of classical music too, this dialectic of confrontation-modification-assimilation played out before it concretised in the post-Independence music scene.

Cultural life in Delhi and Lucknow (and other large parts of colonial India), for example, had all but died after their fall in 1857. Both cities had been important centres of poetry and music in north India till then, harbouring many great talents and masters. In the



A mujra (music and dance performance) in the presence of native princess; early 20th century

course of the bloody battles that raged in these cities during what has been called the First War of Independence, the creative elite – poets, painters, musicians and dancers – had either succumbed during the fighting or fled to neighbouring native states like Rampur, Gwalior, Jaipur and even far-flung Hyderabad. In the absence of Mughal nobility, the business community took on a difficult dual role: that of upholding Mughal traditions by way of patronage to Urdu and Persian, to music and dance, to tawaifs and ustads on the one hand, and playing the loyal subjects of the new Empire on the other. The landed gentry of Bengal and Madras followed suit as did those of Delhi and the United Provinces.

Thus, by the turn of the 20th century, the twin arts of classical music and dance were to see a host of changes, interventions and reinventions. The first to manifest was the emasculation of the traditional modes of patronage. Till now it had mostly been the native princes (and landed aristocrats) that patronised classical music and dance. With the colonial takeover these mainstays of sustenance had been considerably eroded. The castes and communities that practiced and performed music and dance now started to migrate towards the colonial cities of Calcutta, Madras and Bombay to seek new avenues of patronage and livelihood.

Boasting new technologies like electricity, railways, gramophone, cinema and radio, the

20th century would prove to be radically transformational for these arts. Railways made it possible for Indians to move rapidly from one end of the country to the other as had never been possible before. Musicians and dancers took full advantage of this by travelling from remote regions to the colonial metros where theatre houses, film studios and recording companies beckoned.

In fact, some of them became so fond of train journeys that there is the case of Alia-Fattu (Ali Baksh and Fateh Ali), the court singers of Patiala, who got lifetime passes issued to them by impressing colonial patrons with their singing. Many percussionists created rhythmic compositions recreating the motion and sounds of the train on the tabla that are played to regale audiences to this day.

Abdul Kareem Khan of the Kirana school travelled frequently from Bombay, where he ran a school, to Madras where he found new admirers including the legendary Tanjore devadasi veena player, Veena Dhanammal. Thanks to this interaction he was among the first to incorporate south Indian Carnatic ragas and practices in his Hindustani (north Indian) music repertoire. In fact, Abdul Kareem Khan poignantly died at the Pondicherry railway platform during one such journey. By 1901, Alladiya Khan (founder of the Jaipur Atrauli style of khayal singing) had migrated to Bombay from his native Rajasthan, as had many members of the Gwalior and Agra gharanas (families of hereditary musicians). The same year Vishnu Digambar Paluskar of the Gwalior gharana set up his school, the Gandharva Mahavidyalaya, in Lahore.



Abdul Kareem Khan (left) and Faiyaz Khan were the last of the traditional court musicians

All these masters were seeking to find patronage for classical music far beyond its historical domain and all were to teach Hindustani music to pupils from beyond the traditional families and communities that had been the hereditary practitioners and repositories of this art in pre-colonial times. Thus began an era when India started rediscovering its culture and its arts in a manner and a scale that had never been seen in the past. Many regional forms of music and dance had never been performed beyond their native niches. Some like odissi dance and music had to be reinvented from vestigial remnants. Others, such as thumri and dadra, the erotic love songs of the Hindi-heartland, had to be re-created afresh to suit the tastes of a new urban audience. Large public festivals and conferences of music and dance started being organised from Calcutta to Bombay where artistes met, performed and interacted frequently.

Around this time, two farsighted stalwarts, Vishnu Digambar Paluskar (1872-1931) and Vishnu Narayan Bhattacharya (1860-1936), realised that for Indian classical music to survive in the rapidly moving circumstances a number of changes would have to be effected in its presentation, repertoire and mode of transmission from one generation to the next. Also, because classical music (and dance) had been patronised mainly by feudal aristocrats, their appreciation would have to be radically broadened to include the newly

emerging class of Indians who had been educated in the western system and now lived in colonial cities. For the first time, thousands of lay urban Indians had access to classical music through a plethora of new platforms: the stage, the gramophone record, the radio and, a little later, the cinema. These were in addition to the more traditional venues of the courtesan's salon or the zamindar's jalsa ghar, both of which were not only in decline but also clouded by decadence and disrepute.

Bhattacharya and Paluskar were passionate modernisers who set about retrieving and reconstructing a fragmented musical tradition and harnessing it to serve the needs of a society seeking modernity. Their work was to have far reaching consequences for north Indian Hindustani music in terms of its patronage, practice and pedagogy. Vishnu Digambar Paluskar had trained under Balakrishna Bua Ichalkaranjkar, who had learnt khayal singing from the Gwalior gharana of Haddu-Hassu Khan. Having seen the whimsical and capricious nature of princely patronage, Paluskar decided to free classical music from its feudal moorings. He was the first to organise his own public concert and charge a fee for it. He capped this by singing from a raised platform while making his audience sit below on the carpeted floor – a redefining of the status of the musician vis-à-vis his patron.

Ostracised by both fellow musicians and princely patrons alike, Paluskar showed



Vishnu Narayan Bhatkhaunde (left) and Vishnu Digambar Paluskar modernised music practice

great political foresight by joining forces with the nationalist Congress party. With this he was heralding new democratic values into the otherwise largely feudal music world. He toured all over the country singing 'Vande Mataram' at all Congress sessions and founded his school for music at Lahore, naming it the Gandharva Mahavidyalaya. Today, it has grown into an all India organisation thanks to the dedicated nurturing of it by Paluskar and his pupils. Among his very many disciples, the names of Omkar Nath Thakur, Vinayak Rao Patwardhan, Narayan Rao Vyas and his son, Dattatreya Vishnu Paluskar, must be mentioned.

The other reformist, VN Bhatkhaunde, was a lawyer who gave up his practice to

devote himself exclusively to the study of Hindustani music. He travelled to virtually every centre of music in the country to meet, document and learn from many great masters. Never much of a performer, he was India's first modern musicologist who endeavoured to classify, analyse and categorise Indian music and its performance in a systematic manner. He was funded in this task by the princes of Baroda and Gwalior who also set up colleges of music in their principalities under his guidance. Bhatkhaunde researched old musical texts and wrote prolifically in Sanskrit and Marathi, and with his devoted band of acolytes like Srikrishana Ratanjankar and Rajabhaiya Poochhwale notated hundreds of old compositions of dhrupad, dhammar, khayal and thumri in

his Kramik Pustakmala series that runs into several volumes in Hindi. These are till date the basic textbooks for teaching classical music in north India. The system of notation that he devised is still the most widely used.

Faced with such challenges, the response of the hereditary families, the gharanas, was mixed. Some readily cooperated with the institutions that Bhatkhande and Paluskar created and shared their traditional repertoires to be notated and taught in the modern music schools and colleges. Some disagreed with the reformists openly but also started taking on disciples from beyond their families, creating extended gharanas of pupils who were related by musical training but not by blood. Some also devised their own systems of notations to document and teach their repertoires in their own schools. The next two or three generations of master musicians would come from such students of music who had studied with one or more of the traditional masters but came from outside the bloodline of any gharana.

Most of the traditional families found it difficult to adjust to the fast changing social milieu of the colonial cities that had now replaced the myriad princely courts as centres of power, arts and commerce. From around 1908 onwards, the recording industry was booming and even if the proud old ustads and pundits, at least initially, shunned it, the community of the

professional singing women – devadasis and tawaifs – took to cutting gramophone discs in their hundreds. A whole lot of music of the previous century thus came to be preserved on shellac discs and got disseminated widely across the length and breadth of the country, winning an audience and a following among classes of Indians who would never have been exposed to it otherwise.

Although the great ustads and pundits of the traditional gharanas, such as Faiyaz Khan and Vilayat Hussain of Agra, Bhurji Khan of Jaipur Atranli and Mushtaq Hussain Khan of Rampur, to name only a few, were very much alive and active till the 1950s and 60s, the institution of the gharana was waning. The next generation of masters of Hindustani music would come from among those of their students who did not belong to any traditional family. From the early Bhaskar Bua Bakhle to Mallikarjun Mansur, Kumar Gandharva and Bhimsen Joshi in the field of vocal music and Ravi Shankar and Nikhil Bannerjee to Hari Prasad Chaurasia and Shiv Kumar Sharma among instrumentalists, most of our great musicians of the second half of the 20th century did not hail from any traditional musical family.

After a long lull, Delhi was again becoming a centre for the arts from the mid-1930s. Around 1936 Nirmala Joshi, the daughter of a leading Delhi doctor, had gathered around her a nucleus of masters of music

and dance and started the School of Hindustani Music and Dance. Amongst others, she had got Achhan Maharaj, the father of Birju Maharaj, to come from Lucknow to teach kathak dance and went about persuading her friends to send their daughters to learn from him. Lala Punnu Lal Mathur, a rich paper merchant of Chawri Bazaar, sent his daughters, Shibola and Sharan Rani, to learn singing and kathak. "We were a very small class," recalled Sharan Rani to me many decades later. After her early stint in kathak, Sharan Rani was later to become India's first professional woman sarod player.

Reminiscing about her training under Achhan Maharaj, she said, "Not many respectable families sent their girls to be trained in music or dance at that time. Besides me were two other girls; Reba Vidyarthi was one of them and the other, Kapila Malik, joined a little later." Within three years, Vinay Chandra Maudgalya, a pupil of Vinayak Rao Patwardhan, had started a branch of the Gandharva Mahavidyalaya in a small two-room flat in Connaught Place, and Hindustani music got another foothold in Delhi adding a few more students from amongst the anglicised native elite. But despite these



Ravi Shankar was the first global megastar of Indian music

early attempts, Indian classical music or dance did not receive any state attention or patronage till India became free.

In the chaos and anarchy of August 1947, a young Ravi Shankar happened to be staying at the Curzon Road mansion of Sir Shriram of the Delhi Cloth Mills. He had just joined the All India Radio and had learnt that many leading musicians had converged in the capital from all over the country at the behest of the Provisional Government to participate in the festivities marking the Independence of India. "What an opportunity to hold

a mehfil (house concert)," he remarked to Sumitra Charatram, the younger daughter-in-law of his industrialist host. Mrs Charatram was enthused by the idea and with the support of her uncle-in-law, Sir Shankarlal, she organised the first night long concert of classical music in Independent India's new capital. Indeed, Delhi had not seen the likes of such artistes in a long time. The last time such a galaxy of 'native musicians' had gathered in the culturally barren colonial capital was in 1911 when King George V held his Delhi Durbar. And then too, they had been brought by their patrons, the native



*"Who am I, before the queen of music – a mere prime minister!" Jawaharlal Nehru
MS Subbulakshmi (right) with Jawaharlal Nehru and Edvina Mountbatten; circa 1949*



princes, who had come to pay court to the King Emperor. This time, however, it was different. The artistes understood that the days of the feudal order were over and they would have to carve out a following from among the anglicised professional elite, the new capitalists and the fiery nationalists. With many of the maestros who had performed that night as teachers,

Sumitra Charatram soon established the Bharatiya Kala Kendra and the Sankarlal Music Festival with some help from the Central Government. Both are thriving even now.

India was fortunate in having quite a few national leaders, led by no less than Jawaharlal Nehru and Maulana Abul



A Conference of Musicians was inaugurated by President Rajendra Prasad in 1951 in New Delhi.

Seated on chairs from the left: unknown, Nisar Husain Khan, Ahmed Jan Thirakwa, Hafiz Ali Khan, Mushtaq Husain Khan, Omkarnath Thakur, President Rajendra Prasad, Kesarbai Kerkar, Allaudin Khan, Kanthe Maharaj, unknown, unknown, Anant Manohar Joshi and many others including Radhika Mohan Moitra (standing 2nd row 5th from left), Bismillah Khan (2nd row 7th from left), Kishan Maharaj (2nd row 8th from left), Ravi Shankar (2nd row 10th from left), Ali Akbar Khan (2nd row 11th from left), Vilayat Khan (2nd row 12th from left), Narayan Rao Vyas (2nd row 14th from left), Vinayak Rao Patwardhan (2nd row 15th from left), DV Palushkar (2nd row 16th from left) and Srikrishna Ratanjankar (3rd row 6th from left) and Vinay Chandra Maudgalya (4th row 2nd from left)

Kalam Azad, who realised that unless the newly created democratic nation state stepped in to provide support and sustenance, classical music and dance would not be able to survive the colossal social and political upheavals that were taking place in the country. They also felt that these arts, as they had developed over the centuries, were so syncretic and inclusive in nature that their propagation would help heal sectarian wounds and inculcate a broad-minded and catholic view of our culture and nationhood. Besides, classical music was a unifying chord that found resonance across regions crossing the divisions of language, class or creed. As the Punjab vocalist Bade Ghulam Ali Khan famously remarked, "If only classical music had been taught in every household, India would not have been divided."

Very soon, after the formation of the first elected government in 1952, the three national Akademis were set up to encourage, document and disseminate knowledge about the arts and for their training and performance. For the first time since Mughal India, the Union Government got directly involved in the patronage and propagation of Indian classical music and dance at a national level. The All India Radio, and later, the Doordarshan, also played a major part in propagating and supporting these arts. From January 1954, the central Sangeet Natak Akademi, which was mandated

to look after the affairs of music, dance and theatre, started its annual awards honouring the best in these arts that were conferred by the President of India. From that time, it became customary to include music and dance exponents in the Padma awardees lists of the Government of India annually.

Prime Minister Nehru realised the potential of culture as soft power and delegations of musicians and dancers began to be sent out on missions to showcase Indian music and dance all over the globe. Maulana Azad set up the Indian Council for Cultural Relations specifically for the purpose of disseminating Indian culture abroad as early as 1950. It was also not unusual for visiting foreign dignitaries to witness music or dance performances by an eminent artiste before state banquets at the Rashtrapati Bhavan from then on. Subsequent presidents have increased the number of such performances significantly.

A number of music schools and colleges have been set up with direct state support, and today more students are studying and practicing classical music professionally than ever before in our history. The Marris College of Music, set up in Lucknow by Bhatkhande in 1926, was taken over by the Uttar Pradesh government in 1966 and is today a Deemed University renamed as the Bhatkhande Music Institute. Even so, some musicians nostalgically look to

the past when the patrons were fewer in number but were true connoisseurs who cared for high standards of excellence; something that they say has been whittled down somewhat due to less discriminating mass audiences.

Nonetheless, classical music in democratic India has flowered as never before. The best concert musicians command high respect and high fees. For the talented, there are scholarships and other facilities to study music. Also, Indian art music now enjoys a global audience and there are highly informed aficionados of Indian music worldwide and some practising musicians of non-Indian origin too. Thanks to the genius of artistes like Ravi Shankar, a slew of popular western genres from jazz to fusion and world music would not have been what they are had it not been for their interaction with Indian classical music. But that is another story.

SHUBHA MUDGAL:

Versatile Genius

Kuldeep Kumar

Shubha Mudgal is a classical vocalist with a modern sensibility. Primarily a khayal singer, she has also acquired felicity in singing thumri, dadra and other lighter and popular forms. Unlike many classical musicians, she listens to all kinds of music and is a self-confessed admirer of jazz. No wonder that she is not afraid to experiment and has several popular cross-over music albums to her credit.

Born in a musically inclined family of academics in Allahabad, Shubha was exposed to progressive views since childhood as her grandfather Prakash Chandra Gupta, who taught at Allahabad University, was a prominent Hindi literary critic associated with the legendary Progressive Writers' Movement. Both

her parents taught English literature at Allahabad University and her father Skand Gupta earned a name as a sports commentator.

Shubha initially trained as a kathak dancer but after some time started learning classical vocal music and was trained by some of the finest musicians and musicologists of India. In Allahabad, she learnt from eminent teacher and musicologist Ramashreya Jha, a disciple of Bholanath Bhatt. Ramashreya Jha is also famous for his khayal compositions that he penned using Ramrang as his non de plume. Although Shubha moved to Delhi after some years, Ramashreya Jha continued to impart to her his vast learning over a period of nearly three



decades. Simultaneously, she also learnt from Vinay Chandra Mandgalya and Vasant Thakar for many years and was also informally instructed by the likes of the legendary Kumar Gandharva and Jitendra Abhishetti. Well-known thumri and dadra singer Naina Devi imparted her training in these genres. With rigorous practice and determination, Shubha eventually emerged as a well-rounded musician who could handle every form with equal ease.

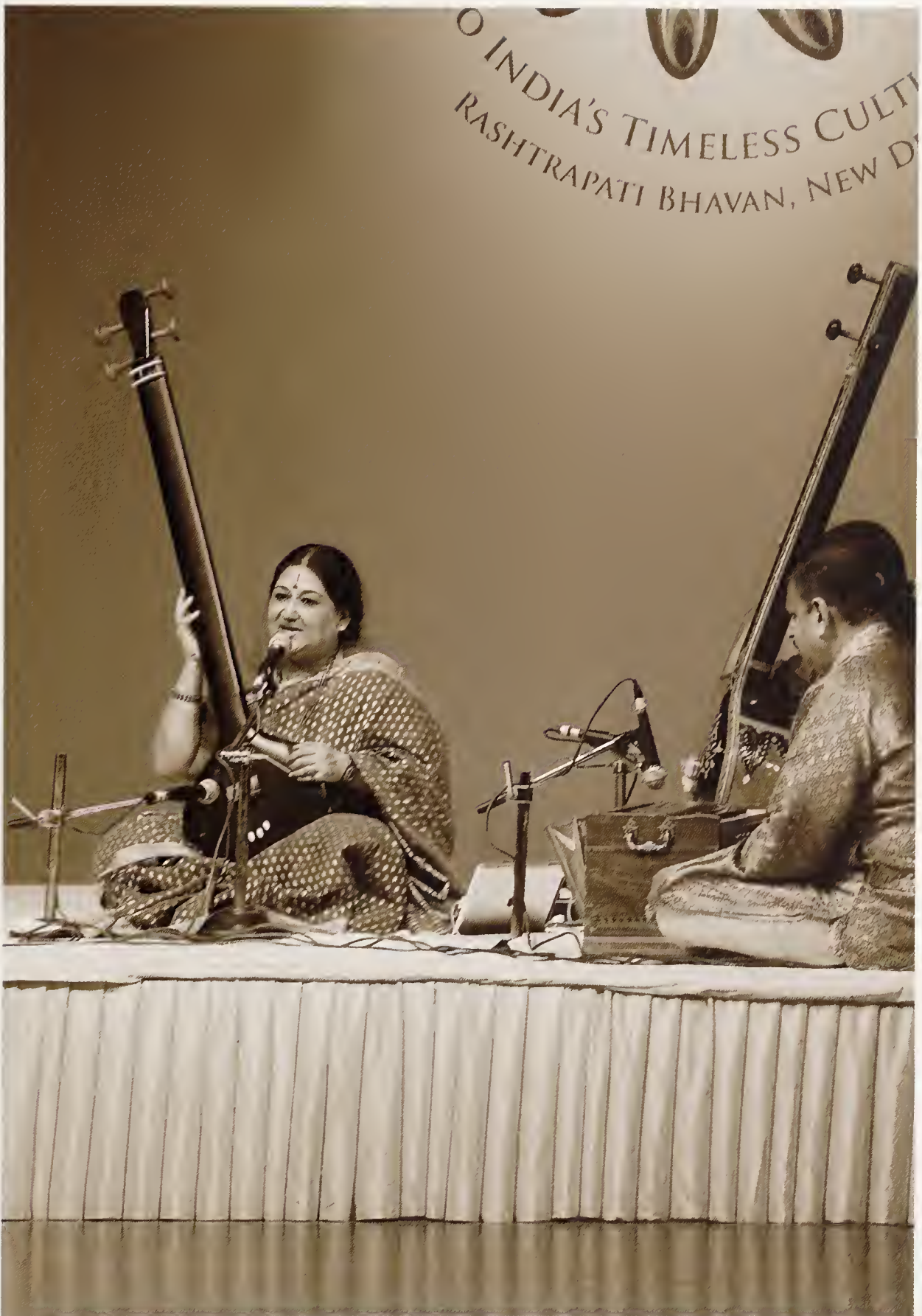
Endowed with a strong and powerful voice, Shubha Mudgal has evolved her own eclectic style, as she does not conform to any particular style or gharana of khayal singing. However, traces of Kumar Gandharva's vocalism can be discerned in her khayal performances as well as bhajan singing. She has earned a nationwide acclaim and popularity as a versatile performer. Unlike many musicians, she is quite techno-savvy and was one of the earliest musicians to have started a website Raag Sangeet soon after the Internet made its entry into India in the mid-1990s. Later, she also founded a recording label called Undercore Records which also publishes books besides bringing out music CDs. In association with her husband tabla player Anvesh Pradhan, Shubha Mudgal established an online distribution platform in 2003 for musicians specialising in diverse forms of Indian music through their website www.UndercoreRecords.com. Among the many projects they have

initiated in their efforts to preserve the rich musical heritage of India is www.Sangeetkosh.net, an online encyclopedia of Indian Music.

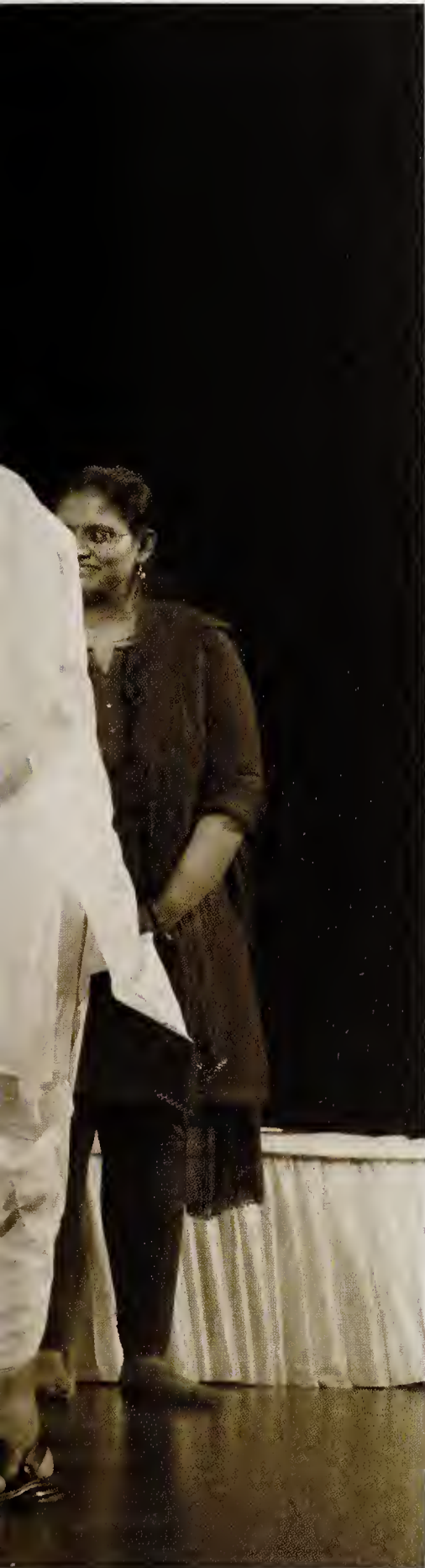
Though a classical vocalist, Shubha Mudgal does not look down upon other forms of music. In fact, she has shown tremendous courage to experiment with pop music by bringing out several video albums such as *No Stranger Here*, *Pyar Ke Geet*, *Divas: Once Upon a Time*, *Dere Dere* and *Other Hits* and *Nachoon Sari Sari Raat*.

She has been an enthusiastic participant in several projects to promote music education in the country. She was a member of the Central Advisory Board for Education and also chaired a focus group that discussed the need to introduce an arts education programme in mainstream school education during the National Curriculum Framework 2005. She was also appointed Nana Shirgaokar Visiting Professor at Goa University. She is a dedicated teacher, an eager student and a well-travelled performer who tours extensively for concerts and other assignments in India and abroad. She divides her time between New Delhi and Mumbai.

Over the years, Shubha Mudgal has been awarded the 1996 National Film Award for Best Non-Feature Film Music Direction for *Amrit Beej*, the 1998 Gold Plaque for







Special Achievement in Music at the 34th Chicago International Film Festival for her music in the film *Dance of the Wind* (1997), and the Government of India bestowed her with the Padma Shri in 2000.

Shubha Mudgal performed at the Rashtrapati Bhavan on 22 September 2012

KHAYAL

Khayal literally means thought or imagination. It is the most prominent genre in north Indian Hindustani vocal music. Khayal gained currency as a popular form around the 18th century when Nyamat Khan Sadarang popularised it from the court of Muhammad Shah Rangile by composing hundreds of khayal compositions and teaching them to his students. Although the origins of khayal, many believe, go back to the time of the Sufi poet-administrator Amcer Khusrau Dehlavi in the 13th century. Khayal is an improvisatory form where the short four line, two stanza lyrics are set to a particular raga in a particular tala of set number of beats in a skeletal composition called the bandish. The singer is expected to improvise according to norms set by tradition within the raga and tala prescribed using the words of the composition or bandish. SK

FACING PAGE: Hon'ble President Pranab Mukherjee, Salman Khurshid, Rajeev Shukla and Mulayam Singh Yadav with Shubha Mudgal and Aneesh Pradhan



HARIPRASAD CHAURASIA:

Virtuoso Flautist

Kuldeep Kumar

When Pannalal Ghosh died in 1960, music lovers thought that the art of flute playing in India would not be able to recover from that blow. Little did they know that a twenty-two year-old lad had quietly filled the void by his dedication, determination and hard work. While Ghosh began his life as a freedom fighter, this young man started as a real fighter in the wrestling arena. His name was Hariprasad Chaurasia and he belonged to a family of wrestlers in Allahabad. His father Chhedilal considered music as a profession fit only for prostitutes and bandmasters but Hariprasad was attracted to it because a

classical vocalist Pandit Rajaram lived in the neighbourhood.

Born on 1 July 1938 in the historic city of Allahabad, Hariprasad Chaurasia secretly started learning classical vocal music from Rajaram when he was barely fifteen. To satisfy his father, he also learnt wrestling and stenography. Within a year he surrendered himself to the charms of flute playing after listening to Bholanath, a noted flautist from Varanasi. He became Bholanath's disciple and learnt the art of flute playing from him for eight years. At the age of nineteen, he joined All India Radio (AIR) as a staff artiste in Cuttack,

Orissa, where he worked both as a performer as well as a composer. This is where he set out on his musical journey which has taken him to every nook and corner of the world.

In 1960, he was transferred to Bombay (now Mumbai) where he became a life-long disciple of the surbahar exponent Annapurna Devi, daughter and disciple of the legendary founder of the Maihar school Allauddin Khan. Annapurna Devi is also the sister of sarod maestro Ali Akbar Khan and the first wife of sitar wizard Ravi Shankar. Leading a reclusive life, Annapurna Devi had a mystique and aura about her as she stayed away from the concert platform and rarely took a disciple. Although Hariprasad Chaurasia has scaled all the peaks of the mountain called Fame, he proudly announces in his public programmes that he continues to sit at her feet and learn even now.

The influence of the Maihar school can be seen in Chaurasia's systematic handling of the alap, jod and jhala sequences in his playing. In terms of sheer virtuosity over the instrument, he has no peer as he has broadened the horizons of flute playing beyond anybody's imagination. In his art, he beautifully combines tradition and innovation into an integrated whole. Through his innovative techniques of blowing, he has expanded the expressive possibilities of his wind instrument so as to bring out the most minute nuances

of Hindustani classical music. A classical artiste on concert circuit, he has also played prolifically for the Hindi film industry. In collaboration with santoor maestro Shiv Kumar Sharma, he composed chart-busting music for many films including *Lamhe*, *Silsila*, *Chandni*, *Fasle*, *Parampara*, *Sahiban* and *Darr* under the Shiv-Hari banner.

IN SHEER VIRTUOSITY, HE HAS NO PEER AND HE HAS BROADENED THE HORIZONS OF FLUTE PLAYING BEYOND ANYBODY'S IMAGINATION.

In his experimental album *Eternity*, Hariprasad Chaurasia incorporated many elements of western music into Hindustani classical music and it went on to become a platinum disc. A compact disc recorded by him at Oslo along with jazz artistes John McLaughlin and Jan Garbarek gained international popularity. He has cut many albums of Hindustani classical music, thematic music, music for meditation and folk music. His performances in India and abroad have received acclaim from audiences, connoisseurs as well as fellow musicians such as Yehudi Menuhin and Jean-Pierre Rampal.

Hariprasad Chaurasia has shared stage with eminent artistes from all over the world. He has performed memorable jugalbandis (duets) with the stalwarts of



Indian classical music like Shiv Kumar Sharma, Zakir Hussain, Balamuralikrishna and Kishori Amonkar, and jammed with western artistes like John McLaughlin, Jan Garbarek, Larry Coryell, Egberto Gismonti and several others. He has also conducted orchestras with western instrumentalists.

He has many dedicated and talented students both in India and abroad who are making their presence felt. He has built an ashram, the Vrindaban Gurukul in Mumbai and Bhubaneswar where he teaches music in the traditional guru-shishya system. He also teaches music at the Rotterdam Music Conservatorium, in The Netherlands where he is the Artistic Director of the Indian Music Department.

Hariprasad Chaurasia was honoured with the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award in 1984 and was made a Fellow of the Akademi in 2012. He has also been bestowed with the Padma Bhushan and Padma Vibhushan by the Government of India.

Hariprasad Chaurasia performed at the Rashtrapati Bhavan on 24 November 2012

BANSURI

Indian bamboo flute, the bansuri, is among the most ancient of musical instruments in India, finding mention even in Vedic literature. More well-known, of course, is its mythological association with Lord Krishna. Krishna plays the flute to charm humans and animals alike. Gopikas – the milkmaids of Vrindavan – especially adore Krishna's flute playing. A highly popular folk instrument, it was incorporated into the classical fold only in the mid-20th century.

Bansuri is a cylindrical tube of bamboo with six to seven open finger holes. There are no keys to produce sharps and flats like the western flute, therefore all the required shrutis (microtones), so vital to Indian classical music, are produced by a special fingering technique. SK

FACING PAGE: Hon'ble President Pranab Mukherjee with Hariprasad Chaurasia and his group



AO NAGA CHOIR:

Dedicated to Hymns

Kuldeep Kumar

As the name suggests, Ao Naga Choir is primarily a musical ensemble of the Ao Naga tribe of Nagaland. Ao Nagas live in the catchments of the five ranges in Mokokchung District of Nagaland lying between the river Dikhu on the east and the plains of Assam on the west. They are rich in their folk traditions of literature and music.

In the year 2009 university students and working professionals belonging predominantly to the Ao Naga tribe discovered their common love for music and got together to form the Choir under the aegis of the Delhi Ao Baptist Church. Presently the strength of the

Choir is thirty members including ten professional singers and musicians and they are mostly Ao Nagas. Some of the members of the Choir have been formally trained abroad in music. In addition to their responsibilities in the church, members of the Choir undertake music education programmes in a number of schools and other institutions besides giving performances in secular spaces as well. The Choir is an affiliate member of The Royal School of Church Music, UK, and is also a member of the International Federation of Choral Music, USA.

The Choir's repertoire includes western classical songs, Broadway musicals,



Moroccan renaissance music, Christian church music and Ao Naga music as well as choruses from operas and operettas. Many of its members teach music in various schools in Delhi while others do jobs elsewhere. This naturally restricts their hours of practice and they can rehearse only for two hours on Sundays before the church proceedings begin. However, their dedication and talent has ensured that in a short span of three years, their fame reached the Rashtrapati Bhavan and they were invited to perform there in 2012.

As can be expected in a voluntary effort, the Choir faces heavy odds in terms of financial support. It does receive some money from the church but that is hardly sufficient to support all their activities and they are, most of the time, starving for funds. According to founder member Luna Yaden, the Choir may not be self-sufficient financially but in terms of human resources, it is standing on its own feet. It has many talented instrumentalists, photographers and composers who are as good as any professional could be. Also, since the aim of the Choir is to spread happiness associated with the traditional lifestyle of the Ao Nagas, the members are not unduly concerned with material success and try to find positivity in everything. Their aim is to create a sense of wellbeing with their happy songs. As the Choir functions under the aegis of the Delhi Ao Baptist Church, its religiously inclined members also aim to

revive singing of hymns in church music. They are conscious of the fact that even western classical music has its roots in the religious music of the church.

However, that is only one of the aims of the Ao Naga Choir, not its *raison d'être*. On any evening, its offerings may include Crazy (Cee Lo Green), It's Yesterday Once More (Carpenters), Hotel California (Eagles), Imagine (John Lennon) as well as songs by Fleetwood Mac, ABBA and Crosby Stills Young and Nash (CSYN). The Choir also presents Hindi film songs of Kishore Kumar and RD Burman.

Ao Naga Choir performed at the Rashtrapati Bhavan on 15 December 2012 and 22 June 2013

FACING PAGE: Hon'ble President Pranab Mukherjee with the members of Ao Naga Choir





WARSI BROTHERS:

The Call of the Mystics

Kuldeep Kumar

Nazeer Ahmed Khan Warsi and Naseer Ahmed Khan Warsi, popularly known as the Warsi Brothers, are true representatives of the long tradition of qawwali singing in the Indian subcontinent. They are the grandsons of the illustrious Aziz Ahmed Khan Warsi, who was awarded the Padma Shri by the Government of India.

Aziz Ahmed Warsi came from the Qawwal Bachche (Qawwal Children) lineage and was the grandson of the legendary Muhammad Siddique Khan, who sang qawwali in Delhi and Hyderabad during the second half of the 19th century.

Muhammad Siddique Khan's father, Ali Bakhsh Khan, belonged to Hapur near Delhi and was a friend of Tanras Khan, court musician of the last Mughal emperor, Bahadur Shah Zafar. Although Muhammad Siddique Khan was primarily trained by Ali Bakhsh, Tanras Khan, too, showed great interest in the grooming of his friend's son and Muhammad Siddique came to be widely regarded as his nephew.

All of them belonged to the extended clan of the Qawwal Bachche who traced their lineage to the Sufi poet and musician Amir Khusrau in the 13th century, when qawwali was gaining ground at the khanqah (place



where Sufis met) of Hazrat Nizamuddin Aulia in Delhi. As is well known, many Sufi saints like Nizamuddin Aulia were very fond of music. In their mystic practices and rituals, music and dance played a prominent role in transporting the devotee into a heightened spiritual state of blissful trance.

The origins of the more classical khayal form are also traced to the practice of qawwali singing at the Sufi khanqahs. In fact, the Qawwal Bachche are credited with introducing elements like taans (fast solfa sequences) as well as intricate layakari (rhythmic play) into this devotional form of music. Bade Muhammad Khan, one of the most prominent representatives of the Qawwal Bachche, emerged as the one who gave khayal its distinctive form. His descendants took up khayal and its associated genres as their main form of singing, but did not ignore the art of qawwali altogether.

This came in handy when, after the British abolished the Mughal court in 1857, many musicians, dancers and poets had to leave Delhi and seek refuge in other princely states. Tanras Khan and Muhammad Siddique Khan migrated to Hyderabad in the Deccan where the nizam employed both of them at his court. Khayal was not very popular in Hyderabad where ghazal and qawwali were given preference. This posed no problem for them as they belonged to the tradition of the Qawwal

Bachche and were adept in the art of ghazal and qawwali singing. However, both Tanras Khan and Muhammad Siddique Khan trained their sons and grandsons very well in khayal singing and several of them – Umrao Khan, Sardar Khan, Shabbu Khan, just to name a few – made a name for themselves all over the country as top-grade khayal singers of the 20th century.

Muhammad Siddique Khan settled down in the Patherghati area of Hyderabad and his descendants continue to live there even today. Following the family tradition, Nazcer Ahmed Khan Warsi and Naseer Ahmed Khan Warsi were initiated into music at the early age of five and were imparted training in Hindustani classical music so that they become experts in all the related genres of khayal, thumri, dadra, ghazal and, of course, qawwali. In addition to qawwali, they were also taught other forms like qaul, qalbana and naat as they constitute a group of interrelated genres. One can do vistaar (elaboration) and upaj (improvisation) only when one is well-versed in all these forms and knows how to put them to the best creative use in the course of performance.

Over time, qawwali as a form has undergone myriad transformations. There have been highly popular qawwals like Habib Painter and Shakila Banu Bhopali, who could express the complex philosophical thoughts of the Sufi saints in such simple

language and with such musical artistry that even the less illiterate among the listeners would be able to understand and enjoy the verses.

However, the hallmark of the Warsi Brothers' singing is that they have remained true to the age-old traditional qawwali as it was sung at the khanqahs of the Sufi dervishes and Amir Khusrau's compositions naturally form the bulk of their repertoire. This distinguishes them from the other qawwals who often tend to play to the gallery with more filmy airs.

The Warsi Brothers are widely travelled both in India and abroad and have performed at a number of prestigious venues in the country and across the world.

Nazeer Ahmed and Naseer Ahmed Warsi performed at the Rashtrapati Bhavan on 13 January 2013

QAWWALI

Easily the most evocative flowering of Indo-Persian culture, the qawwali developed in north India from around the 13th century. It could have begun as a part of the mystical ritual of samaa, or trance, at Sufi khanqahs or seminaries. Music and dance were widely used here to induce haal, the state of Oneness with God. There was a great deal in common with the Hindu Bhakti Movement, that too used music and dance as a means of Uniting with the Absolute through direct relationship of personal adoration and love. Qawwali developed as a syncretic form absorbing identifiable traits from a host of musical forms and poetic ideas prevalent in India and Iran from the 12-13th century onwards till present times. It uses and improvises verses from a wide range of poetic sources in as many languages and dialects. These can stretch from the Holy Quran to the most popular current songs — anything that could be applied to or connected with the idea of love, ishq. Musically too, it is heterogeneous: swinging from the slow and somber qaul to the lilting khayal and thumri-type bandishes, to a racy tarana and even filmy ditties. It is a hugely performative form where the main singers (usually two to four) are accompanied by a large clapping chorus who sing the refrain. SK

FACING PAGE: Hon'ble President Pranab Mukherjee with the Warsi Brothers and their troupe



GIRIJA DEVI:

The Essence of Banaras

Kuldeep Kumar

Girija Devi is the doyenne of the Banaras school of Hindustani classical music and represents the best in what has come to be known as the poorab ang gayaki, or the eastern style. Although her rendering of khayal is impeccable, her forte lies in the singing of forms like thumri, dadra, tappa, chaiti, kajri, sawan, hori, jhoola and bhajans. After the generation of the greats like Siddheshwari Devi and Rasoolan Bai passed away, it was Girija Devi who held the fort and emerged as a true inheritor of the traditional Banaras style that was once represented by the likes of Rajeshwari

Bai and Vidyadhari Bai. Today, she can be justifiably called the last great vocalist of the Banaras thumri. She is rightly acclaimed by music enthusiasts and connoisseurs alike, and even at the age of eighty-five, she continues to perform with admirable dedication to her art and her concert halls are packed to capacity.

Born on 8 May 1929 in Banaras, Girija Devi was initiated into music at the young age of five by Pandit Sarju Prasad Mishra. She learnt from him for more than ten years. After he passed away, Pandit Srichand Mishra took charge of the promising





student and trained her till his death in the early 1960s. Both these gurus shaped her artistic personality and instilled the traditional values of music and life into her, thus gifting to the world a great vocalist whose art is truly inspiring and whose proficiency is simply unparalleled.

Girija Devi gave her first public solo programme on All India Radio's Allahabad station in 1949. Then came a programme at Arrah in Bihar which proved to be a great hit and since then, there has been no looking back. Soon, she came to be regarded as one of the most promising voices in the world of Hindustani classical music. After the death of Badi Moti Bai,

Siddheshwari Devi and Rasoolan Bai, she became the uncrowned queen of the Banaras style. Although both the Lucknow style and Banaras style are part of the *poorab ang gayaki*, they differ in their treatment. The Banaras style carries greater influence of the Bhojpuri dialect and folk traditions and is much more flexible as well as emotional. It is much closer to the day-to-day life experiences of the ordinary people. And Girija Devi's powerful yet melodious voice is the perfect medium for the earthy vocalism of this style.

Besides the romance laden *thumri* and *dadra*, the folksy *chaiti*, *kajri* and *hori*



and devotional bhajans from an integral part of Girija Devi's vast repertoire. Most of her concerts end with devotional compositions of saints like Kabir, Surdas, Tulsidas, Meera, Guru Nanak and Namdev and she sings them with the soulful expression of the bhakti rasa, exuding peace and tranquillity. She normally begins her concerts with a slow-paced khayal composition in a raga and follows it up with a medium tempo or fast tempo composition in the same raga. Only after establishing her credentials as a classical vocalist, does she turn towards the so-called semi-classical forms in which she comes into her element and dazzles the audiences with her virtuosity, creative

imagination and musical expression. Thumri and dadra, like other semi-classical modes, allow for innovative blending of various ragas and greater freedom to the artiste to express the essential mood of the composition. Girija Devi excels in *bol banao ki thumri* (rendering the same words with different emphasis and nuances at a leisurely pace) as well as *bol baant ki thumri* or *bandish ki thumri* (placing more emphasis on complex rhythmic play). While *bol banao thumri* is a speciality of Banaras, *bol baant ki thumri* is associated with Lucknow.

Girija Devi is also a dedicated teacher who has trained many talented pupils.

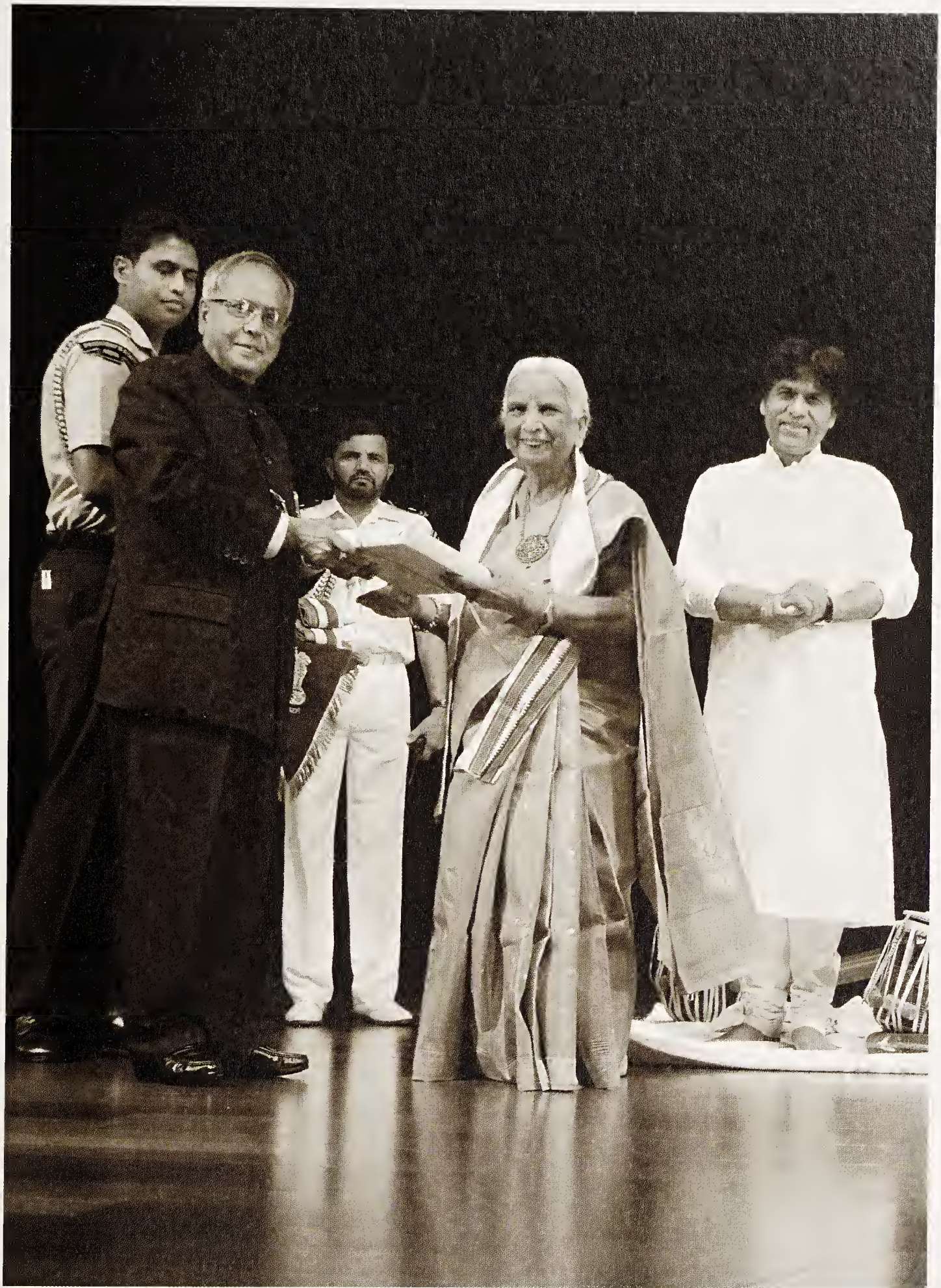
She was on the teaching faculty of the ITC Sangeet Research Academy and the Banaras Hindu University. In her long performing career, honours and awards have come her way on their own. In 1972, the government honoured her with the Padma Shri and in 1989 with the Padma Bhushan. The Sangeet Natak Akademi conferred its prestigious award on her in 1979 and its highest honour in 2010 by making her its Fellow. She is also the recipient of the Tansen Samman and honorary doctorates from several universities including Mahatma Gandhi Kashi Vidyapeeth, Rabindra Bharati University and Purushottam Das Tandon Open University.

Girija Devi performed at the Rashtrapati Bhavan on 31 March 2013

THUMRI

A soulful and sensuous love song describing the state of the beloved, thumri developed around the Vaishnav Bhakti Movement in the Braj dialect from the 15th century onwards. From its sacred Radha-Krishna context it spread to the courts and salons to acquire more earthy overtones. As it spread eastwards, towards eastern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar; in places like Lucknow, Benaras and Gaya it got more refined and absorbed Awadhi and Bhojpuri influences to acquire the celebrated purab-ang, or the eastern style. Nawab Wajid Ali Shah, the last nawab of Awadh, was very fond of thumri and under his patronage and intervention it rose to great sophistication both in song and in dance. Bhaiyya Saheb Ganpat Rao, Maujuddin Khan and Bindadeen Maharaj are credited with creating new thumris and styles of delivering them and teaching them to many professional women singers in the early decades of the 20th century. In the 1940s and 50s a western punjab ang was developed in Lahore by Ashiq Ali Khan and his followers like Bade Ghulam Ali and Barkat Ali Khan. SK

FACING PAGE: Hon'ble President Pranab Mukherjee felicitating Girija Devi







ARUNA SAIRAM:

Committed Innovator

Kuldeep Kumar

At fifty-four, Aruna Sairam is one of the most sought-after Carnatic vocalists today. Her vibrant voice and eclectic, innovative style of singing moves the listener emotionally, yet also compels him or her to think. She has been variously called an 'innovative traditionalist' or a 'traditional innovator' to underline her penchant for innovation and improvisation and for the continuous evolution of her art.

Born to culturally inclined parents whose tiny 750-sq ft apartment in Bombay (now Mumbai) attracted top writers, musicians and dancers, Aruna Sairam started learning music at a very early age from her mother, Rajalakshmi Sethuraman, who would, every morning,

sing Meera bhajans before the idols of Krishna and Radha at their home. It was Rajalakshmi who encouraged her daughter to experiment with new ideas and forms and never be afraid of innovation. After gaining a good initial grounding in the basics of Carnatic classical music, Aruna Sairam went to the great vocalist, T Brinda of the Tanjore school, and it was Brindamma who chiselled Aruna's talent so as to turn her into the artiste that she is today.

However, it was no easy journey. Brindamma was very choosy about her students and did not readily accept a new one. While she taught senior students, Aruna would sit in the other room listening. After two months, she was allowed to sit near the door of the room. Suddenly, one day, luck smiled on her and Brindamma called her into the room and asked her to sing with the group. Teaching styles in the southern Carnatic tradition are not very different from what they are in its northern Hindustani counterpart. Just like the ustads and gurus of yore who would teach the disciple only a bandish (composition) and not the raga, Brindamma, too, did not teach Aruna any ragam but only asked her to sing. When Aruna sang, she would comment on various aspects of the singing and the composition. The reason behind this practice was Brindamma's desire that her disciples should not become her clones. She encouraged them to develop their own independent identity as

vocalists. Aruna Sairam learnt from Brindamma the essence of singing with emotion as she trained her in the style of her own guru and grandmother, the legendary Veena Dhanammal.

However, Aruna was not content with learning from just one guru, no matter how great she might be. So, to broaden her understanding and to enlarge her repertoire, she went to S. Ramachandran, who belonged to the bani (style) of Chittor Subramanya Pillai, and learnt the nuances of nereval singing (improvising within poetic texts) from him. From AS Mani, a disciple of Tiger Varadacharyar, she received expertise in singing sargams (solfa syllables) and weaving charming patterns with them, thus mastering the art of swar kalpanas. Her stint with veena vidwan, KS Narayanaswamy, taught her the 'logic' behind every gamaka, the microtonal oscillations whose ample and distinctive use distinguishes Carnatic singing from other styles.

Her never-ending search for perfection took Aruna Sairam to Professor Eugene Rabine, a German expert of voice culture, who understood the uniqueness of the timbre of her voice and helped her with his suggestions as to how she should apply her voice to express a variety of emotions. Even now, she remains in contact with other experts of voice culture such as the New York-based David Jones. For many years, the inimitable Balamuralikrishna



several gold medals and other prizes, there have been no dearth of these after she became a mature artiste. She has received many honours from India and abroad. In 2006, the Tamil Nadu government conferred the prestigious Kalaimamani on her. In 2008, she received the US Congress Proclamation of Excellence Award. The next year, the Government of India honoured her with the Padma Shri. In 2013, Rajah Sir Annamalai Chettiar Memorial Trust, Chennai, decorated her with its annual award.

Aruna Sairam performed at the Rashtrapati Bhavan on 18 April 2013

has been guiding her in her creative pursuits.

Aruna showed promise at a very young age and won her first gold medal when she was just eight at the Shanmukhananda Sabha Competition in Bombay, and by the time she was fourteen, she had started giving solo concerts. She won the Best Young Musician Award at the annual conference held at the Music Academy in Chennai.

If as budding youngster, Aruna won

LEFT: Hon'ble President Pranab Mukherjee with Aruna Sairam

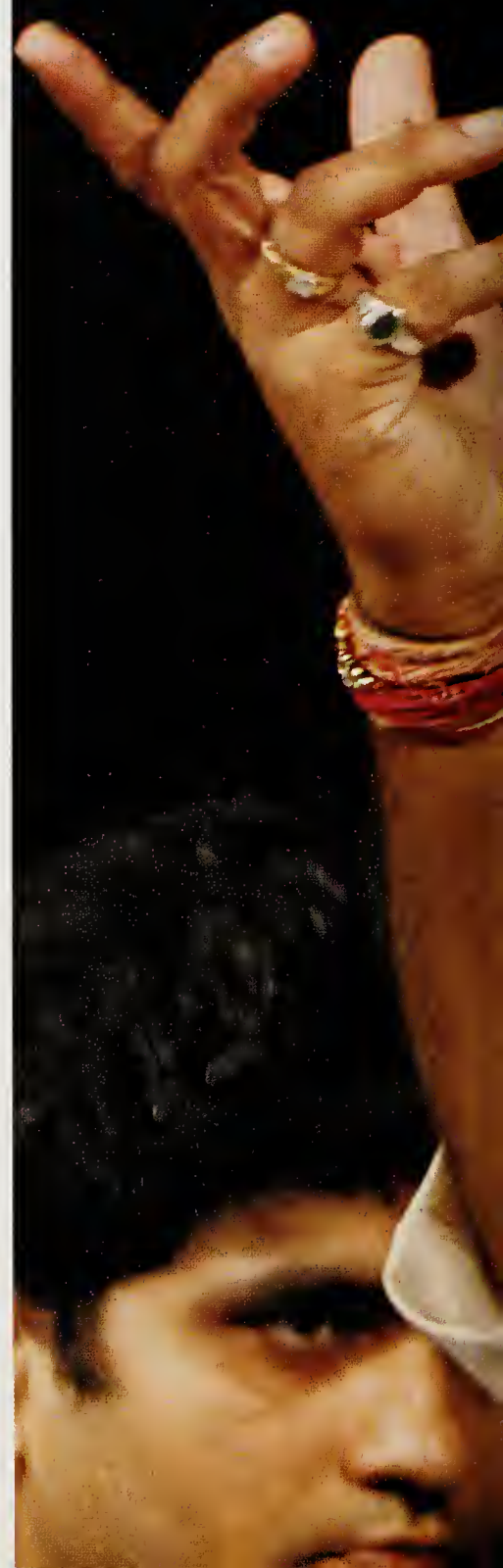
BHUVANESH KOMKALI:

To Music Born

Kuldeep Kumar

Still in his thirties, Bhuvanesh Komkali is one of the most promising vocalists of his generation. He is full of creative ideas, bursting with passion and is not afraid of charting his own course in music. He sings several song-forms such as khayal, thumri, tappa and bhajans with equal ease.

Bhuvanesh was a child born to music and his pedigree is truly enviable. He is the grandson of the legendary Kumar Gandharva who blazed a trail in 20th century Hindustani music and mesmerised music lovers with his unique voice, innovative genius and path-breaking experiments. Often called a rebel, he brought freshness into the tradition-





dominated field of music where feudal gharanas (family traditions) reigned supreme and individual creativity was at a low premium. Kumar Gandharva broke the shackles of the tradition, renewed it with his unique approach and expanded its domain by blending classical with folk music. He had a worthy disciple in his wife Vasundhara Komkali. His son Mukul Shivputra, is Bhuvanesh's father. At a time when quite a few vocalists were trying their best to emerge as clones of Kumar Gandharva, Bhimsen Joshi or Jasraj, Mukul Shivputra endeavoured to find his own voice and style. Kumar Gandharva's daughter Kalapini Komkali is also a highly competent vocalist.

The rich musical atmosphere within the family naturally helped Bhuvanesh a lot to shape up as an artiste. In his childhood, he had the good fortune of learning from his grandfather who was, besides being an extraordinarily creative and innovative performing musician, a great teacher too. An old photograph shows a doting grandfather teaching a very young Bhuvanesh who is also playing tabla so as to grasp the composition along with its rhythm. Unfortunately, when he was a lad of just fourteen years, Kumar Gandharva passed away. After his death, the responsibility of training Bhuvanesh fell on the shoulders of Vasundhara Komkali who performed her duty with great affection, diligence and seriousness. He also has the benefit of guidance

from Madhup Mudgal, a prominent disciple of his grandfather and principal of Gandharva Mahavidyalaya, Delhi. Consequently, Bhuvanesh has been able to emerge as a polished vocalist.

Like his father Mukul Shivputra, Bhuvanesh too draws inspiration from the late Kumar Gandharva but avoids replicating his singing. After his grandfather's death, Bhuvanesh listened to numerous recordings to understand the nuances of Gandharva's style so that he could develop one of his own. His style of singing does display strong influences of his grandfather but, in the final analysis, it is truly his own. He is pursuing the goal of establishing an archive of Kumar Gandharva's recordings in the family's house in Dewas, Madhya Pradesh, to preserve his rich legacy. He is actively involved in the arduous task of digitising his grandfather's recordings. Such an archive will go a long way to help future students and researchers of Hindustani classical music. Although it is a work-in-progress, its doors are open to all and entry is free of charge.

Kumar Gandharva was known for thematic treatment of music. He presented specially designed programmes like Varsha Ritu (Rainy Season), Bal Gandharva, Surdas, Tulsidas and Kabir. His singing of nirguni bhajans remain unsurpassed to this day. Bhuvanesh too has paid due attention to presenting compositions and ragas that



Bhuvanesh has performed in almost all the prestigious music festivals in the country including the Sawai Gandharva Festival, Pune, and Shriram Shankarlal Festival, Delhi. He was awarded a scholarship by Department of Culture, Government of India. Karnataka state government decorated him with its Mallikarjun Mansur Memorial Award. He lives in Dewas, Madhya Pradesh, India.

Bhuvanesh Komkali performed at the Rashtrapati Bhavan on 18 April 2013

are relevant to the theme or context of the situation. A few years ago he was invited to perform at the Pashupatinath Festival in Kathmandu, Nepal. There are not only many ragas like Kedar and Shankara that are associated with Shiva, but Kumar Gandharva had also composed a fast tempo bandish in Shankara and it is justly very famous. However, instead of taking the easy route of picking one of these, Bhuvanesh decided to do something new and made use of several Shiva stotras (Sanskrit hymns in praise of Shiva) and ashtaks (eight-line stanzas) to compose his own bandishes or compositions. This demonstrates his intellectual approach towards music.

LEFT: Hon'ble President Pranab Mukherjee felicitating Bhuvanesh Komkali



SHEKHAR SEN:

The Actor Singer

Kuldeep Kumar

He is an actor, singer, music director, composer, theatre director, lighting man all rolled into one. No wonder when Shekhar Sen turned fifty in February 2011, sitar maestro and recipient of the Bharat Ratna, Pandit Ravi Shankar wrote to him: “Some years ago my mind was blown away when I first saw you in your production of Kabir in Delhi. The whole conception of your one-man show with your singing, your compositions, acting, plus all the details was unbelievable! Shekhar, I admire you as a great creative artist.” Such high praise from an international icon like Ravi Shankar is not easy to come by and it

shows how utterly mesmerising Shekhar Sen’s art is.

Born in a musical family in Raipur, Chhattisgarh, in 1961, Shekhar Sen has inherited music from his parents. His father Arun Kumar Sen was vice-chancellor of Indira Sangeet Kala Vishwavidyalaya, Khairagarh, and had made a name for himself both as a vocalist of the Gwalior gharana as well as a seasoned musicologist. Shekhar’s mother Anita Sen, too, was a vocalist. Although he studied commerce for his bachelor’s degree, Shekhar learnt to sing and play violin and sitar. He also trained as a kathakali artiste for some time.

In 1979, he left Raipur for Bombay (now Mumbai) to become a music director. He was signed by HMV as a ghazal singer but was drawn towards devotionals, realising that singing and composing bhajans was a much more fulfilling experience for him. After years of struggling in Mumbai he decided to chart out his own path.

Shekhar drew inspiration from Bharata's Natyashastra as well as the Baul tradition of Bengal where there is no separation between the actor and the singer. He also watched theatre and film actors Raghunath Yadav and Annu Kapur who could act and sing with equal ease. He noticed that even in the West, actors often sang. In a musical play, the immediacy with which one has to alternate between dialogues and singing can be best attempted by an actor. Shekhar was fortunate enough to come into close contact with top Hindi litterateur Dharnidhar Bharati who encouraged him in his creative endeavour.

Shekhar Sen wrote the songs as well as dialogues of his first mono-act play Kabir interspersing it with the saint-poet's own poetry. When he presented it for the first time, it was a great success. Shekhar completely identified himself with Kabir and his experiences as a low caste weaver who was not sure which religion he actually belonged to. Consequently, he questioned the established tenets and practices of both Hinduism and Islam and earned the ire as well as respect of both

the communities. Shekhar Sen's soulful singing and consummate acting made the audiences feel as if they were in the presence of the great saint-poet himself. No wonder that he has staged 250 shows of this play all over the world.

On a trip to the United States, he saw a Chinese visitor reciting from Tulsidas's Ramacharitmanas. This inspired him to write a musical play about that great saint-poet also. Soon, he took up other great medieval poets such as Surdas and Raskhan and came out with hugely popular mono-act plays about them. His play on Swami Vivekananda has also received accolades from lay spectators as well as the cognoscenti. A special feature of his musical plays is that it hardly uses any musical instrument as a prop and the entire production is carried on the strength of his mellifluous voice with impeccable pronunciation and diction.

Shekhar Sen has been honoured with many awards. Uttar Pradesh Sangeet Natak Academy conferred the Safdar Hashmi Award 2001 on him while the Maharashtra Rajya Hindi Sahitya Academy decorated him with the prestigious V Shantaram Samman.

Shekhar Sen performed at the Rashtrapati Bhavan on 27 April 2013

FACING PAGE: Hon'ble President Pranab Mukherjee felicitating Shekhar Sen



ABDUL RASHID KHAN:

Musical Miracle

Kuldeep Kumar

Abdul Rashid Khan is in fact nothing short of a wonder. At 106, the venerable vocalist from Uttar Pradesh is the oldest performing musician in the country. Not many people are able to complete a century. And among those who accomplish this rare feat, not many can claim to be concert fit. Therefore, when Abdul Rashid Khan hits a pure and perfect note with a passion, verve and élan that would put a young man to shame, one is left completely awestruck. We see in him an example of how age can be defied by lifelong rigorous riyaz (practice), disciplined living and self-control.

Born on 19 August 1908 in a family of traditional musicians, Abdul Rashid Khan was initiated into music by his uncle Bade Yusuf Khan and later trained by many other elders of his extended family. His family traced its origins to Miyan Tansen who was one of the nine jewels in Mughal Emperor Akbar's court and is perhaps the most famous musician in India's musical history. It is said that the family has descended from Surat Sen, the third son of Miyan Tansen, and is also related to Behram Khan. Abdul Rashid Khan imbibed the stylistics of the Gwalior gharana (school) of khayal singing and developed it further



in accordance with his creative instincts and artistic sensitivities. However, he took care of always keeping himself within the parameters handed down by the Gwalior tradition. By the dint of sheer talent and hard work, he eventually emerged as a formidable performer who could not only sing khayal, but also forms like dhrupad, dhammar and thumri with equal ease and felicity. The special layakari (rhythmic) patterns of the Gwalior style can be glimpsed in his impactful singing. Besides being a virtuoso performer, he is also an accomplished composer who has created more than two thousand bandishes (compositions) with the non de plume of Rasan Piya.

Abdul Rashid Khan has made a name for himself for the purity of his style. His specialty lies in his resonant singing and rich mellow voice that has not lost its lustre even at this advanced age. When he touches the high notes in the upper octave, his virtuosity as well as amazing breath-control come into full play and when he stays on a note for what seems to be an eternity, it is sheer bliss. He possesses an understanding of the ragas and repertoire that is rarely seen these days. As a result, he combines the erudition of a music scholar with the performative skills and excellence of a creative virtuoso.

His long musical journey has not been without its ups and downs. It is said that when he was at the peak of his creative

prowess and was nearly forty, a jealous rival poisoned him by administering mercury in a paan (betel leaf). This resulted in his losing his fingers, toes and nearly all his eyesight.

However, his voice remained intact to regale his vast audiences in India and abroad. He believes in the traditional Gwalior way of singing in an open, natural and full-throated voice which is projected with full force. Microphones were not able to make any impact on his voice or style, as he never allowed the technology to dictate terms to him. This is quite unlike most modern-day vocalists who have tailored their voices to the needs of artificial amplification. He leads a well-regulated life and has not given up his daily riyaz even at this ripe old age.

Since the early 1990s, he has been associated with ITC Sangeet Research Academy, Kolkata, as a resident guru and has trained many worthy students. However, he is not as strict with them as his guru was with him. When young Abdul Rashid Khan started learning music, his guru asked him to sing only the first three notes for at least three months. When a bored Abdul Rashid Khan one day attempted the fourth one, the guru overheard him from the next room and extended the period of singing only the first three notes for another three months.

A musical wonder, Abdul Rashid Khan



has received many awards and felicitations in the course of his long journey. They include the ITC Award, the Sangeet Natak Academy Award of the Uttar Pradesh government, Kashi Swar Ganga Award, Ras Sagar Award, Ras Rang Samman, Central Sangeet Natak Akademi Award and the Padma Bhushan from the Government of India, among others.

Abdul Rashid Khan performed at the Rashtrapati Bhavan on 27 July 2013

ABOVE: Hon'ble President Pranab Mukherjee felicitating Abdul Rashid Khan



SHIV KUMAR SHARMA:

Master of a Hundred Strings

Kuldeep Kumar

Post-Independence India has seen a few new additions to the number of musical instruments used in classical music. During colonial and feudal times certain instruments were deemed to be fit for certain ceremonial functions, for example the shenai, or for folk music, the santoor. However, in the cultural renaissance that took place around the time of independence both these instruments got inducted into the classical music concert platform by the sheer dint and talent of two great masters of these instruments.

What Bismillah Khan did for the shehnai, Shiv Kumar Sharma did even better for the santoor. Before Bismillah Khan

appeared on the scene, shehnai was played at the gates of the temples and the courts or on auspicious occasions such as engagements, weddings, birth of a son. The repertoire then consisted of folk tunes, thumris, dadras and also some classical ragas. The greatness of Bismillah Khan lay in his successful attempt to raise the shehnai to such a height that it was accepted at par with other instruments like the sitar and the sarod.

However, santoor did not enjoy any close proximity with classical music as it is essentially a folk instrument of the Kashmir Valley. Before Shiv Kumar Sharma transformed it into a full-fledged classical instrument, only folk musicians

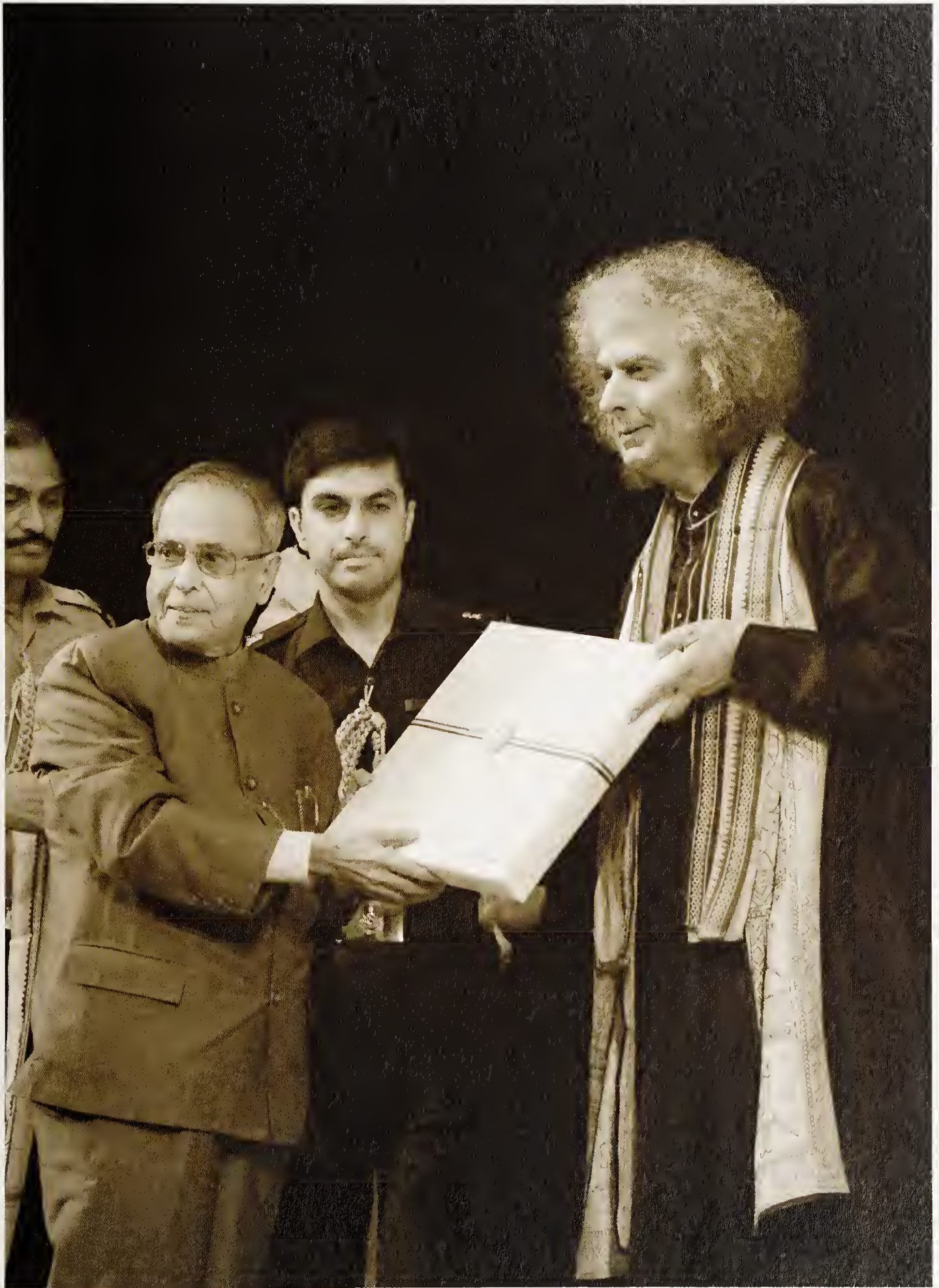
played santoor while singing Kashmiri folk songs. Sufi mystics too used it while rendering their sufiyana qalam. However, many other musical instruments such as saz, rabab, sitar, tumbakanari and ghat were also played along with it. In sufiyana music, the santoor player is the leader of the group of singers and plays the instrument while singing. Unlike shehnai, its repertoire never had anything to do with the classical genres of Hindustani music although strong imprints of the Persian muqam system could be noticed.

Shiv Kumar Sharma single-handedly introduced santoor as a solo instrument in the hallowed precincts of the highbrow, conservative classical music by enhancing

its expressive capabilities. Today, its popularity surpasses that of even sitar and sarod, especially among young listeners.

To achieve better tonal quality, he preferred walnut to the toon wood traditionally used to make the instrument. In the traditional santoor, four strings are stretched on each bridge for each note. However, it posed a problem for the player, especially when he tried to play the fast sequences like taans. Shiv Kumar Sharma experimented for ten long years to adapt the instrument to his creative requirements and came to the conclusion that three strings on one bridge could serve the purpose better in the middle and upper octave, whereas only two strings on one bridge would





suffice for lower octave. He made these strings thick and coiled so that they could resonate like sympathetic strings while playing. He has also changed the tuning system of santoor and his instrument has a total of thirty-one bridges with eighty-seven strings. Now, his santoor has a range of two-and-a-half octaves instead of the earlier one-and-a-half. To produce meend-like legato effect and an elongated note, he developed a special technique and proved to the world that creativity did not brook physical limitations imposed by the structure of an instrument.

Born in Jammu, Shiv Kumar Sharma learnt music from his father Uma Dutt Sharma who was an expert vocalist and tabla player. In fact, the young Shiv Kumar had become an adept tabla player before he focused his attention on santoor. The understanding of rhythm proved to be very useful in his subsequent musical career. A chance meeting with the famous film director V Shantaram led him to compose the background music for a scene in his film *Jhanak Jhanak Payal Baaje*. Shantaram asked him to make Bombay (now Mumbai) his home and compose music for his future films. But determined as he was to emerge as a classical musician, Shiv Kumar Sharma politely declined the offer. However, after he had established himself as a classical musician of repute, he along with flautist Hari Prasad Chaurasia composed music for a number of films including *Silsila*, *Lamhe* and *Chandni*. He

has received many honours and awards including the prestigious Sangeet Natak Akademi award, the Padma Shri and the Padma Vibhushan from the Government of India.

Shiv Kumar Sharma performed at the Rashtrapati Bhavan on 24 August 2013

SANTOOR

The santoor is derived from Persian santur and related to a vast family of instruments spread from Persia to Greece and from Kashmir to Indonesia in the east. Some musicians have mentioned a similar hundred-stringed lute, the shatatantri veena in Sanskrit texts also. Made of walnut wood it is a trapezoid dulcimer, hammered with specially shaped mallets called mezbabs held between the index and middle fingers. Most santours have two sets of bridges and cover a range of two-and-a-half octaves. SK

FACING PAGE: Hon'ble President Pranab Mukherjee with Shiv Kumar Sharma and his troupe



SHILLONG CHAMBER CHOIR:

Versatile Voices

Kuldeep Kumar

It's not for nothing that Shillong is known as the 'rock capital of India'. After all, it boasts of the Shillong Chamber Choir whose young members were chosen to perform before some very special guests at Rashtrapati Bhavan in New Delhi. The D-Day was 8 November 2010 and the guests were none other than US President Barack Obama and his wife, Michelle Obama.

The choir was formed in 2001 by Neil Nongkynrih, a son of the soil. Once a rebellious teenager, Nongkynrih went to England to train as a concert pianist despite stiff opposition from his father. He studied at the Guildhall School of Music and Trinity College, London. Thereafter,

he worked as a concert pianist in Europe for thirteen years. However, he found it difficult to adapt to the 'commercial and elitist' professional music scene there and returned to Shillong, only to find that discontent and anger among the youth in this green valley was pushing them towards substance abuse at an alarming rate. Realising that the youth were troubled, he decided to offer his music as a gift to his beloved land and its people. So, he formed the Choir with the local youth. As his music had a healing effect, Neil came to be known as the man with a golden touch. He not only makes beautiful music, but he also has the rare ability of coaxing others to bring their inner music out into the open.



The Shillong Chamber Choir is a multi-genre choir that has performed in India as well as abroad with tremendous success. In 2002 it won a silver award in the folklore category at the 2nd World Choir Games in South Korea. In 2008, the Bollywood scriptwriter, Urmi Juvekar, made a short film, sponsored by the Government of India, on the Choir. A year later, the Choir performed with the visiting Vienna Chamber Orchestra in Shillong and Kolkata and was invited to showcase its talent in Sri Lanka. In July 2010, it bagged Gold Diplomas in three categories – Musica-Sacra (sacred music), Gospel (medley of a few songs) and Popular (medley of Bollywood and English numbers) at the 6th World Choir Games held at Shanghai in China. In October 2010, the Choir became a household name in India after winning the finals of the reality talent show, India's Got Talent (Season 2), on Colours TV. The Choir had been accustomed to singing operas in different languages, but when it decided to sing the classic Hindi film songs, Ajeeb Dastan hai Ye and Yeh Dosti from *Dil Apna aur Preet Parayi* and *Sholay* respectively, the songs clicked in such a way that they won the day.

Next year, the Choir had another performance in Shillong with the Vienna Chamber Orchestra. The programme presented Hindi film songs that had been refashioned by Neil Nongkymrih for the choir and the orchestra. The Shillong

Chamber Choir has also collaborated with Shankar, Ehsaan and Loy at the second Global Indian Music Awards. It has composed and sung four songs for their debut Malayalam movie, *Goodbye December*, and the song Madi Madi was aired live by BBC.

The versatility of the Shillong Chamber Choir becomes obvious when one considers the fact of their collaborations with the Vienna Chamber Orchestra and the Fitzwilliam Quartet on one hand and with Bollywood icon, Amitabh Bachchan, on the other. Its Christmas album in 2011 became the highest selling in the country for non-cinematic music. Now, the Choir comprises twenty-five musicians, including fifteen singers and their latest collaboration was with the tabla wizard and international celebrity, Zakir Husain.

They are indeed a highly versatile and active Choir on the Indian music scene today.

Shillong Chamber Choir performed at Rashtrapati Bhavan on 15 December 2013

FACING PAGE: Hon'ble President Pranab Mukherjee with the members of Shillong Choir





SHAHID PARVEZ KHAN:

A Chip off the Old Block

Kuldeep Kumar

With his serious approach to music and his dazzling virtuosity in handling the sitar, Shahid Parvez Khan is one of the foremost instrumentalists in the country today. In his late fifties today, he is at the peak of his performing career and has won over large audiences in India and abroad making him much sought after on the concert circuit.

Shahid Parvez is the scion of the Etawah gharana that traces lineage from the first recorded sitarist, Ustad Imdad Khan. In the 19th century, Sahebdad Khan, who belonged to a family of traditional musicians, learnt khayal singing from the legendary founders of the Gwalior gharana – Haddu and Hassu Khan. Later,

he moved to Etawah in Uttar Pradesh and became an expert player of sitar and surbahar. However, it was his son Imdad Khan who emerged as an instrumentalist of great renown and is considered as the founder of the Etawah gharana.

Gharana literally means ‘of the household’ or clan but, in the musical context, it also denotes a distinct style of singing or playing musical instruments associated with a particular clan of musicians. Their disciples, who may or may not belong to the clan, are also considered members of the gharana as they carry forward its style and the underlying aesthetic principles.

Imdad Khan had two sons – Inayat Khan and Wahid Khan. Of them, Inayat Khan



Hon'ble President Pranab Mukherjee felicitating Shahid Parvez Khan

rose to great heights as a renowned sitar and surbahar player and became a star performer. Unfortunately, he died young. His son Vilayat Khan emerged as one of the greatest sitar players of the 20th century and introduced explicit elements of khayal singing into his style of playing the sitar. This necessitated some changes in the structure of the sitar and its playing techniques. Although Shahid Parvez did not directly learn from him, he is today regarded as the foremost exponent of the Vilayatkhani baaj or the Vilyat Khan style.

Shahid Parvez is the grandson of Wahid

Khan who initially trained him in vocal music at the tender age of three. Later, Shahid also learnt to play tabla from Munne Khan of the Delhi gharana. However, his training in playing sitar took place exclusively under his father Aziz Khan who, much to the disappointment of Wahid Khan, had turned his attention to composing music for Hindi films. In fact, Wahid Khan's other son Hafiz Khan, too, became a music director in Bollywood and came to be known as H Khan Mastana. The fact that both his sons had given up classical music for earning their livelihood in the film industry came as a

huge disappointment to Wahid Khan. He made Aziz Khan promise that he would dedicate his son Shahid to the exclusive pursuit of classical music.

Aziz Khan fulfilled his promise to the fullest measure and groomed his son with rigorous training right from childhood. As a consequence, Shahid Parvez has, with his talent and hard work, emerged as one of the finest sitar players in the country. He has beautifully coalesced the elements of the staccato instrumental style (tantrakari) with legato-based song-inspired khayal gayaki to create his own distinctive style of playing sitar.

The way he uses the wire plectrum (mizrab) to play right-hand strokes is amazingly dextrous. He has incorporated the style of Imdad Khan for creating bols (rhythmic textures) with the use of mizrab. In his time, Imdad Khan would use this technique intermittently but his son Wahid Khan used it more regularly in his playing of surbahar. Shahid Parvez is said to be the first sitar player to use this technique and it lends a lilting movement to the fast sequences of notes called taans. His execution of long meends (legato slides) are particularly charming as also is his serious treatment of the raga as can be seen in his introductory alap that has a meditative quality about it.

Shahid Parvez has brought out dozens of LPs, cassettes, CDs and albums. He

has also played duets (jugalbandis) with Carnatic musicians as well as the Hindustani vocalist Ustad Rashid Khan.

Shahid Parvez is a top grade artiste of the All India Radio and a recipient of many awards such as the Padma Shri from the Government of India, the Sur Shringar Award, Kumar Gandharva Samman, M L Koser Award, Sangeet Natak Akademi Award. He lives in Pune.

Shahid Parvez Khan performed at the Rashtrapati Bhavan on 9 February 2014

SITAR

Easily the most widely recognised Indian musical instrument the world over, the sitar is also the most dominant classical instrument in India. The name comes from the Persian setar, a similar smaller, three-stringed fretted lute with a long elongated neck and a resonating chamber made of gourd. From Mughal times (16th century onwards) it has undergone much evolution both in form and in its musical range. Musicians pluck the strings with a wire plectrum called the mizrab worn on the right forefinger while the left hand manipulates the strings with subtle finger work on or between the frets. SK

SEEKING INDEPENDENCE, DISCOVERING DANCE

Leela Venkataraman

Nationalism and the struggle for Independence ushered in a process of rediscovering the Indian identity, which had been blurred by a long period of colonial rule and English education. Thus the popular discovery of the so-called 'classical' and other dances that we saw during this period was an inherent part of this quest for self-discovery. This cultural revival, which peaked in the 1930s and 40s, sought to re-establish connections with largely lost pre-colonial value systems and was led by cultural activists whose lives and philosophies were shaped by the likes of Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhiji's Satyagraha and Khadi movements influenced writers and theatre people in particular. Several of these stalwarts working in the field of culture were also directly involved in the political struggle like the Congresswoman Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, whose contribution to the revival of handicrafts, textiles and theatre is invaluable.

The early decades of the 20th century was also the time when the traditional professional artistes and entertainers including the devadasis and the baijis were floundering against swelling public disenchantment with their whole class. To add to their woes, their traditional support system - which derived from the temple and the native courts - had been reduced to an emasculated condition under the British Raj. Music still had a niche audience, though all the gurus had begun looking for more cosmopolitan patrons and



A group of devadasis from Tanjore; early 20th century

there was a movement of these artistes towards the modern colonial cities of Calcutta, Madras, Bombay and New Delhi where new opportunities and newer audiences beckoned. Culture activists in different regions of the country, like Rabindranath Tagore in Bengal, Rukmini Devi Arundale in Madras, Vallathol Narayana Menon in Kerala, Satyavati Malik, Vinay Chandra Maudgalya and Nirmala Joshi in Delhi, had started on independent journeys of revitalising the traditional arts as an important national prerogative. Classical dances, both traditional and ‘reinvented’ (such as bharatanatyam and odissi), till then were practiced largely within their own regions of origin. It was Rabindranath Tagore who, after a first exposure to the graceful manipuri dance in 1919, insisted on having the dance taught as part of the syllabus in his school at Shantiniketan a few years later – this led to the dance form’s wider discovery.

In Delhi the efforts of Nirmala Joshi, RN Haksar, Shivraj Bahadur and others led to the founding of the School of Hindustani Music and Dance in 1936, with Achhan Maharaj, the kathak maestro from Lucknow, sarod ustad Hafiz Ali Khan of Gwalior and vocalist Mushtaq Hussein Khan of Rampur as teachers. Nirmala Joshi and Kapila Malik (later Kapila Vatsyayan) were to be among the first kathak students from non-traditional families to learn the dance. Soon, Delhi also saw the establishment of the Gandharva Mahavidyalaya

and the Sharada Ukil School of Arts. Modern training institutions had by now begun taking the place of the traditional guru's abode and its guru-shishya (master-disciple) system of transferring knowledge from one generation to the next.

By the early 1940s such schools of dance had increased, and unique amongst these was Uday Shankar's school in Almora. Uday Shankar was the founder of the Modern Dance movement in India, and his colourful and exotic productions introduced western audiences to glimpses of Indian dance. His ambitious Almora project, however, had to be closed down due to lack of funding. This led trained artistes from the institution like Devendra Shankar, Prabhat Ganguly and Narendra Sharma to settle down in Delhi (and other regions) teaching what came to be known as Oriental Dance – an eclectic mix of dance styles created by Uday Shankar. Another of Uday Shankar's disciples, Sundari Shridharani, was to set up the Triveni Kala Sangam at New Delhi by 1950.

In 1945, the first All India Dance Seminar held at Ferozshah Kotla treated Delhi audiences to a maiden experience of a kathakali presentation, Daksha Yagna. The unusual nature of its costumes, makeup and loud percussion were such that the presentation almost caused a cultural shock. Kathak guru Achhan Maharaj created special productions, *Kimara*

Sambhava and *Brarlila*, for the occasion. The legendary Ram Gopal presented *bharatanatyam* items and the linear perfection of the form captivated people both in India, and later, abroad.

By the time Independence came there was a core group of activists and practitioners who were both well versed in the arts and also well-connected with the freedom movement. Freedom came, with the jubilations tinged by the horrors of Partition—to be followed soon after by Gandhiji's assassination. However, Jawaharlal Nehru, our first prime minister, and Abul Kalam Azad, his minister for Education and Culture, were extremely cultured and erudite men and realised that the modern democratic government would have to take over the role of preserving and promoting cultural practices, a role that had been vested with the native courts till that time. It was only during the first Republic Day Parade in 1950 that the new nation was first treated to a glimpse of the amazing variety of folk dances from our enormous treasure chest of dance practices — stylised and celebratory. With the establishment of the three national Akademis, the process of stocktaking, documentation, institutional reorganisation and funding of these arts began in earnest between 1953 and 1959.

The other final turning point in dance history was the abolition of the devadasi practice by law in 1947. Traditional gurus

were now teaching a new class of aspirants from genteel backgrounds and non-traditional families, which till now would have never seen dance as a respectable vocation for women. In Madras (now Chennai), a thirty-year old Rukmini Devi, hailing from a conservative Brahmin family, had set up a training institution – the famed Kalakshetra – in 1936. Along with the best of what was imbibed from the gurus, Rukmini Devi's creativity gave the dance a new sophistication suiting the changed audience and the proscenium theatre. Today, it is still the leading institute

for training in bharatanatyam, though it is now under the Union Government as an Institute of National Importance.

In Kerala, kathakali troupes (kaliyogams) were sliding into mediocrity without patronage till 1930 when the poet, Vallathol Narayana Menon, along with his contemporaries, Manakulam Kmjunni Raja, Nilamboor Valia Raja and Mukunda Raja, set up a training institution called Kalamandalam. By 1963 it had become a State Akademi, guiding the fortunes of dance in that state. Alongside the all-male



Rukmini Devi Arundale refined the art of the devadasis and made it bharatanatyam



Vallathol Narayana Menon set up Kerala Kala Mandalam in 1930 and Achhan Maharaj (right) was the first to teach kathak in New Delhi in 1936

form of kathakali, Vallathol also started a mohiniattam unit wanting to resurrect in all its glory this graceful all-female dance tradition of Kerala, and ridding it of the reputation it had acquired for titillating eroticism. Locating the last of the still surviving exponents of the dance, Kunjukuttyamma and Chinnammamma, and a traditional teacher Krishna Pannikar, the very hesitant start in Mohiniattam (which had to literally woo students to join for training) soon blossomed. Later teachers like Kalyanikuttyamma, flourished working outside Kalamandalam in a small town and trained several disciples. Research followed and enterprising dancers like Kanak Rele, Bharati Shivaji, Kshemavathy, Deepti Omehery Bhalla and several others

have worked to understand and expand both its vocabulary and repertoire.

With the formation of linguistic states, dance in Orissa (now Odisha) sprung a revival as a part of its theatre movement, with acting-eum-dancing talents like Pankajeharan Das, Kelueharan Mohapatra and Debaprasad Das working for the Annapoorna Theatre Company. Brief dance items as preludes before a play were devised for attracting larger audiences. The traditional temple dancers, the maharis, were by then on the brink of oblivion. In 1954, the fledgling efforts at putting together whatever dance had survived historical vicissitudes in a form termed 'odissi' was presented by Priyambada Mohanty – the entire performance not

taking more than ten minutes—and won special recognition through prizes in an Inter-University Youth Festival at Delhi's Talkatora Gardens. Enthused by the review written by the critic Charles Fabri in the newspaper *The Statesman*, and the response of the public, dance teachers, musicologists like Kalicharan Patnaik and educationists like Mayadhar Mansingh along with other scholars and historians initiated a movement called Jayantika in 1957. The objective was to restructure the dance while erecting a sophisticated edifice on the foundations of what was prevalent, working out a format for the concert platform. The result was that a whole generation of leading dancers from non-traditional families like Indrani Rahman, Sanjukta Panigrahi, Soual Mansingh and even Yamini Krishnamurti took to the newly re-created style. Thus began the story of odissi that today has captured the imagination of creative persons all over the world.

In the Andhra region, the surviving dance-theatre form of kuchipudi yakshagana, practiced by Brahmin males, saw traditional teachers leaving their homes in search of patronage in cities like Madras, where many of them became choreographers for film companies. But soon, gurus like Laxminarayana Sastry introduced a solo version of the tradition,

bringing in female dancers in the 1950s into what had traditionally been a sole preserve of Brahmin males. The dance began to attract several established female dancers from other dance forms too—like Yamini Krishnamurthy, a bharatanatyam dancer whose training had started at Kalakshetra. In 1962, initial state support to Siddhendra Kalakshetra for kuchipudi training in the village of Kuchipudi led to the production of *Ksheera Sagara Shayana*, a dance-drama choreographed by the legendary Guru Vempati Chinna



RIGHT: Ram Gopal was an early professional male practitioner of odissi dance

Satyam. This performance created history and had as its leading artiste a young Yamini Krishnamurti playing the role of Mohini, Vempati Chinna Satyam himself playing Shiva, and Vedantam Satyam as Dhanavantari. The institution after some changes came under the Telugu University. From 1989 Kuchipudi village has had the existing state-run Siddhendra Yogi Kala Pitham, also under the supervision of the Potti Sriramulu Telugu University.

In Assam, sattriya an all male theatre form practiced as a part of ritual in the Vaishnavite monasteries (sattras), with dance forming an important element, began from the 1950s, coming out of the cloistered seclusion of the sattras, with redesigned versions of solo items for the proscenium, where female practitioners also participated.

With the passing away of Achhan Maharaj in 1947, what the Bharatiya Kala Kendra (registered in 1952) in Delhi ran as its kathak department supported by a grant from the Sangeet Natak Akademi, with reputed gurus like Shambhu Maharaj of the Lucknow school and Sunder Prasad of the Jaipur school at its helm, was brought directly under the Akademi's control as a separate institution called the Kathak Kendra. This was a landmark event, the institution even today functioning as a nodal centre for training and sponsoring kathak events, representing all the styles of kathak. Earlier in 1954, the Sangeet

Natak Akademi also started the Jawaharlal Nehru Manipuri centre in Imphal, the foremost training centre for manipuri even today.

As early as 1952 the Akademi had started conferring annual awards and fellowships on artistes chosen by its executive council. Among them, apart from traditional gurus were artistes from the new generation coming out of these institutions who were injecting into their arts new and innovative ideas. Kumudini Lakhia, who trained under Shambhu Maharaj, established Kadamb in Ahmedabad and choreographed several unique group productions giving a new look to kathak. Daksha Sheth, a product of the Kathak Kendra Delhi, started experimenting with original ideas in both music and dance, and went on to doing contemporary work where basic kathak inspired movements blended with martial arts from Kerala like kalaripayattu and mallakhamb. Contemporary Dance acquired its most cosmopolitan face in Astad Deboo, whose productions stem from combined influences of training in kathak and kathakali and western modern dance of the Martha Graham school. A tradition like bharatanatyam got its staunchest anti-establishment statement questioning the traditional repertoire in Chandralekha, whose productions used the bharatanatyam movement vocabulary to express themes on important human issues. Her choreography found connectives for bharatanatyam in



Daksha Sheth combines martial art with her contemporary dance

kalripayattu and yoga.

What began as a renaissance in different regions of the country soon became part of the pan-Indian and later international performance arena. With growing cross-regional and cross-cultural interactions, through domiciled populations and cultural exchanges through international festivals, interaction with world dance forms has created new perspectives and ways of looking at the traditional dance forms. In an attempt to retain the distinct stylistic identities, while catering to the requirements of international performance spaces with cosmopolitan audiences, dance forms have also shared

stages with traditions like flamenco, hip-hop, ballet, Modern Dance. Dancers and choreographers who are engaged in working on different types of themes and dances, which aimed at realising a higher state of consciousness, are now also endeavouring to engage with themes concerning existentialist everyday living. In an evolving world, Indian dances, too, are acquiring varied manifestations.



SHRI RAM: *The Evergreen Epic*

Leela Venkataraman

*Yavat sthasyanthi girayaha saritashcha mahitale
Tavad Ramayana katha lokeshu pracharishyati*

*(As long as the mountains stand and the rivers flow on Earth
So long will the story of the Ramayana continue to be told and retold)*

So goes the Sanskrit verse from the Balakandam of Valmiki's Ramayana. With Ram Lila performances celebrated in lanes and by-lanes of rural and urban India, every adult and child in the country is familiar with the story of this ideal avatar upholding the highest values of mankind (maryada purush).

Shriram Bharatiya Kala Kendra's production Ramayana premiered in 1957, and with nearly 3,000 shows, spread over fifty-seven years, continues to attract ever increasing audiences. The production was the brainchild of Sumitra Charatram, the founder of the institution and a product of the Banaras Hindu University. For her, the story of the great Indian epic with the values it upheld was part of her consciousness and upbringing. Her compelling urge to visualise the magic of this myth in the form of a dance-drama for all audiences, young and old, won the support of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, whose grant of 26,000 rupees from the Prime Minister's Fund, provided the initial impetus. Talented

personalities from various disciplines were commissioned to provide new inputs to the original Hindi script by Ramdhari Singh Dinkar, music by Sushil Das Gupta and Jyotindra Moitra, with Narendra Sharma doing the choreography in the free style. To capture this mammoth epic through an enacted performance spread over two-and-a-half hours was akin to trying to contain the sea in a teacup, entailing phenomenal creativity and many hours of work. Rehearsed over a period of 120 days, with over forty-five dancers involved, more than 200 musicians participated in the making of its soundtrack which took 90 days, comprising nearly 2,000 studio hours spent in two studios! With 12 tailors fashioning over 2,000 garments, and with a large crew of carpenters and painters working to create the opulent sets, this magnum opus of the Shriram Bharatiya Kala Kendra is still attracting record audiences year after year. Time has wrought several changes over the decades, with many creative minds contributing inputs. Many choreographers like Guru Gopinath, Devendra Shankar, Yog Sunder, Krishnan Nambudiri and K. Shckharan have brought in fresh perspectives through multiple dance vocabularies. Countless artistes, over the years have come and gone with many actor/dancers, through several presentations, becoming synonymous with characters in the ballet – particularly those appearing in the roles of Rama, Sita, Kaikeyi, Dasaratha, Shoorpanakha, Ravana and Hanuman.

In 1983-84 when Doordarshan screened Ramanand Sagar's year-long serial Ramayana, it was watched in every Indian's living room by the entire family. Competing with media entertainment, Shobha Deepak Singh, the Director of Shriram Bharatiya Kala Kendra, began to feel that the ballet needed to constantly

THE RAMAYANA WAS THE BRAINCHILD OF SUMITRA CHARATRAM, WHOSE DANCE-DRAMA WON THE SUPPORT OF JAWAHARLAL NEHRU

reinvent itself, to retain its popular appeal. Her involvement in this venture right from 1969 as a child, while unobtrusive, had familiarised her with the endemic problems faced by the actors and organisers. Later, she began to think of changes without taking away from the aesthetics or tone of spirituality. Commissioning Neelabh and Arvind Kumar, she first introduced changes in the script by removing passages in the Avadhi dialect, not understood by contemporary urban Hindi-speaking audiences. Shanti Sharma and Biswajit Roy Chowdhury reworked the music. Armed with a wide reading of modern theatre, inculcated under E. Alkazi of the National School of Drama, Shobha Deepak Singh began to rework the ballet. While retaining the mystic element of Rama's divinity transcending the barriers of spatial and universal time, she wanted



to make the characters more accessible to contemporary perceptions.

The huge audiences that Shri Ram (as it is now called) continues to attract even today, reinforces the evergreen popularity of this timeless tale.

A performance of the dance-drama Shri Ram by Shriram Bharatiya Kala Kendra was held at Rashtrapati Bhavan on 13 October 2012



RIGHT: The Hon'ble President Pranab Mukherjee felicitating SBKK Director Shobha Deepak Singh and Shashidharan Nair

MADHAVI MUDGAL:

Odissi Elegance

Leela Venkataraman

A renowned odissi exponent, Madhavi Mudgal grew up in environs where classical music was a way of life. Her father, the late Vinay Chandra Maudgalya, was the founder of the premier school of classical Hindustani music and dance, the Gandharva Mahavidyalaya, in the capital. Initially trained in bharatanatyam and kathak under eminent gurus, Madhavi settled for odissi as her medium, training under Guru Hare Krushna Behera before she became one of the leading disciples of the great Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra. Reputed for her refined aesthetic sensibility, Madhavi has brought to odissi an evolved elegance along with a feel for choreography,

particularly in group presentations.

A well-honed understanding of the body, its central line and deflections of the torso and the limbs from the centre—all so important in the odissi form, has led Madhavi to train younger dancers with impeccable technique as well. Together with her unerring eye for group arrangements in the performance space, her productions become a blend of visual sleekness and imaginative creativity. Easily the most travelled among odissi artistes, Madhavi has performed extensively around the globe and participated in prestigious international festivals such as the Edinburgh Festival, the Festivals





of India abroad, The Kennedy Center's Maximum India Festival, Vienna Dance Festival, Wuppertal and Berlin Festpiele, the Avignon Festival in France to list only a few.

Madhavi's dance comes with music of very high order. Her brother Madhup Mudgal, who is a fine composer and highly acclaimed vocalist, provides Madhavi with a fine musical base, a starting point for triggering her creative energies. Several of her choreographies are totally guided by musical composition, like Kalyan, where she played with musical spaces of the Kalyan raga in a salutation to the

divinity. Or in Teevra Madhyam, in which musical motifs of many ragas, each with their own identity, were translated into spatial arrangements in odissi dance, with the focal binding point being the note teevra madhyam (the sharp Fourth). Based entirely on a composition comprising the percussive variety existing in odissi music traditions was Vadya Vaividhya, where abstract dance was guided by rhythmic arrangements of instruments like mardal, khol, khanjana, the ghanta and jod-nagara.

Verses from Sanskrit texts have also led to some rare productions like Ahvan, an invocation to the Primordial Fire or Agni



for purification and wellbeing. Sohamasmi, based on verses from Ishopanishad is performed by three dancers, with formations looking at the same movement frontally, in profile and with the dancer's back to the audience. Turning to modern poetry Madhavi transformed Tagore's allegory Sagarika, a work he wrote in 1927 on India's relationship with South-East Asia, into a rather original dance choreography.

Among her contributions to odissi is the very first marathon exercise to reevaluate the dance form after its revival and restructuring in the late 1950s. This came in

A KEEN UNDERSTANDING OF THE BODY, ITS CENTRAL LINE AND DEFLECTIONS OF THE TORSO AND THE LIMBS, LEADS MADHAVI TO DANCE WITH IMPECCABLE TECHNIQUE

the form of the Angahar Festival mounted by the Gandharva Mahavidyalaya through Madhavi's enterprise in 1985 in Delhi. The festival had all the top gurus in attendance, along with the traditional Maharis (dancers attached to the Puri temple) and Gotipuas (traditional boy dancers), and all the leading contemporary practitioners



of odissi. The progress on every style of odissi that had been prompted by the gurus was noted and discussed apart from a packed programme of demonstrations, discussions and performances. An excellent publication with articles by scholars and senior practitioners of odissi was released at the same time, making the entire Angahar event a historical landmark.

Madhavi Mudgal's work and contribution to odissi has been recognised through several awards like the Padma Shri in 1990, the Orissa State Sangeet Natak Akademi Award, the Sanskriti Award in 1984, the Central Sangeet Natak Akademi Award in 2000 and also the Chevalier de l'ordre des arts et des lettres by the Government of France.

Madhvi Mudgal's odissi dance performance was held at Rashtrapati Bhavan on 16 February 2013

ODISSI

Originating in the temples of Odisha, odissi is one of the eight classical dance forms of India. The elaborate postures of figures of dancers found in the temple sculptures of Konark, Puri and Bhubaneswar provide the basis for this form. It is marked by the basic chawka position, a half-sitting posture used constantly by the dancer. Equally prominent is the curvaceous tribhangi which divides the body into three parts. The mudras or hand gestures used are similar to those of bharatanatyam. The erotic love play between Krishna and Radha, as depicted in Jayadeva's Geeta Govinda, provide the lyrical mainstay of odissi dance. SK

FACING PAGE: The Hon'ble President Pranab Mukherjee with Madhavi Mudgal and her troupe



KARNA: *Fortune's Discarded Child*

Leela Venkataraman

Consistently sinned against for no fault of his, the character of Karna in the epic Mahabharata never fails to move people. Karna was born out of the union of young Princess Kunti with the Sun God, Surya. The unwed mother, afraid of social censure, sets the baby afloat in the river in a casket. The casket is accidentally discovered by an elated childless charioteer and his wife, who adopt the child, Karna, as their own son. Thus, the first born of the six celebrated Pandava princes of Hastinapura is destined to live with the sobriquet sutputra (the lowborn) all his life. Despite his phenomenal skill in archery, his supposedly low parentage shuts all doors of opportunity in his face. It prevents him from training under the greatest of teachers, Dronacharya, and

even from contesting in events along with other princes to win the hand of Princess Draupadi. But seeing the prowess of this youngster, so consistently isolated from aristocratic circles, Duryodhana, the Kaurava prince, for his own selfish designs of destroying his consins, the Pandava brothers, befriends Karna drawing him into his fold and elevating his status by bestowing on him the Kingdom of Anga.

When the field gets set for the Great War at Kurukshetra between the Pandavas and the Kaurvas, the Queen Mother Kunti, after years of silently watching the humiliations heaped on her eldest born for no fault of his, goes to meet him. Confessing her betrayal and disclosing to him his true royal lineage, Kunti entreats



Karna to switch loyalties. But upright Karna is a loyal soldier and will not desert Duryodhana whose magnanimity has given him the place and dignity denied to him all his life by his own mother and half-brothers. Promising that he will fight none of his brothers except Arjuna, he comments that even if one of them falls, Kunti would still be mother to five other sons.

Then in another act of treachery, Lord Krishna tricks Karna to gift away the golden armour and ear ornaments that he was born with as the child of Surya, the Sun God, because these made him invincible. On the battlefield, while struggling to extricate the wheel of his chariot from the mud, Karna is unchivalrously felled by

Arjuna's arrow. Hailing the greatness of his human qualities, Krishna extols that even in death Karna exemplifies righteousness.

Shriram Bharatiya Kala Kendra tackles the story of Karna as the theme of a dance-ballet. With not a single ignoble deed in his entire life, the unrelenting suffering that Karna goes through moves one to question the fruit of justice, if any, in life. The answer lies in remembering that righteousness is its own reward. Through the long series of misdeeds in the Mahabharata—of a mother conceiving out of wedlock and then discharging her child to save her reputation and then after years of silence trying to wean him away from his duties through emotional blackmail; of

Yudhisthira, whose addiction leads him to gamble away his wife and brothers; the unfair killing of an opponent in battle; disarming an opponent through trickery and leaving him vulnerable – only one character stands tall and unblemished, and that is Karna.

The ballet is choreographed using the technique of Mayurbhanj chhau, one of the three dance forms which derived its body movements from the exercises of the tribal Paika militia attached to the rulers in the regions of Odisha, Bihar and Bengal. This dance form, traditionally practiced and performed as part of the celebrations under royal patronage during the Chaitra Parva festival, has been widely explored for dance-drama choreographies by the late Guru Krishna Chandra Nayak who worked at the Shriram Bharatiya Kala Kendra for many years. Through several years of presentation, the original choreography has undergone changes under Shashidharan Nair, a disciple of Krishna Chandra Nayak. Along with the elaborate costumes designed by the Kendra's Director, Shobha Deepak Singh, Karna is a heartrending ballet epitomising the grandeur of the human spirit which can triumph over unrelenting misfortunes. A moving dance-theatre production indeed.

Karna by Shriram Bharatiya Kala Kendra was performed at Rashtrapati Bhavan on 25 May 2013



ABOVE: The Hon'ble President Pranab Mukherjee felicitating the cast of Karna

GITANJALI TROUPE:

Celebrating Tagore

Sharmishtha Mukherjee

A few months ago, sitting in the plush Rashtrapati Bhavan auditorium I saw a presentation of Rabindranath Tagore's dance-drama Bhanushingher Padabali performed by Gitanjali Troupe. It was a bit strange to watch the show as a spectator because I grew up with the Troupe, participating in its productions innumerable times in my early years.

Gitanjali Troupe was founded by my mother, Suvra Mukherjee, in late 1970s. Born out of her love for Rabindranath Tagore and his music, the group's mission was to present Tagore's music and dance-

dramas to Tagore lovers in the capital, and at the same time to introduce the uninitiated, primarily non-Bengali audiences, to the delicate melodies of Rabindra Sangeet. An interesting feature of the group was that all its members were proficient performers, but not professional artistes. The early Gitanjali was a cocktail, comprising a doctor, an architect, an anthropologist, few government servants, some housewives and students – all sharing a common love of Tagore and art. My own involvement with it started from my school days, participating in group dances, slowly graduating to lead roles. Later, because of my own professional



commitments, my direct involvement with the group ceased. But the training and performing experience that I gathered in those early years proved invaluable in my career as a professional kathak dancer.

I still remember the fun-filled rehearsals with chai and samosa breaks in between. There was music, dance, jokes and roars of laughter over silly mistakes. Creative people tend to be a bit over sensitive, so there would be major arguments over minor issues. I remember my mother handled these situations gently but firmly. She was not only the creative fountainhead of the group, but also a mother figure to all members, helping and nurturing them even in personal matters. I learnt from her (not so much from my father) how to handle group dynamics which came in handy when I started a group of my own. She was, and still is, a beloved *baudi* (sister-in-law) to all past and present members of Gitanjali Troupe.

Under her artistic direction, Gitanjali slowly metamorphosed from a loose gathering of Tagore lovers into a serious, professional group presenting Tagore's works all over India and abroad. Gitanjali presented well-known dance-dramas of Tagore like *Shyama*, *Chitrangada*, *Chandalika* et al, and also created many new productions, bringing to the audience Tagore's message of universal peace, love and harmony. There were experimental works too. Recently, I came across a

collection of CDs presenting a fusion of Rabindra Sangeet and Indian classical music. My mother had done that way back in 1980s. She also got the lyrics of many of these dance-dramas translated into Hindi for a wider reach.

The first such production was of *Chandalika*, the story of an untouchable girl and a Buddhist monk, highlighting the fundamental equality of all human beings. Premiered in the mid-1980's, it was a big hit and people still remember it. In 2012, when India and the artistes' fraternity were celebrating Rabindranath Tagore's 150th birth anniversary, one famous classical dancer, who was earlier associated with Gitanjali, asked me for the Hindi script of *Chandalika*.

Over the years, my mother created an interesting format that presented not only Tagore's works, but also showcased Indian folk and classical dance traditions. In this way, she catered not only to a wider audience, but also gave platform to a greater number of artistes from different genres to showcase their talent. In its heydays, Gitanjali was a much sought after platform for young classical dancers. This two-part format was a great success abroad as it not only showcased Tagore's works but also presented a more composite slice of Indian culture.

Gitanjali was very active through the 1980s and 90s. It performed all over India



and toured the UK, France and Germany several times. In 1997, Gitanjali went to perform in East and South Africa under the banner of ICCR. One of the memorable highpoints for Gitanjali members was being invited for tea by the late Prime Minister Indira Gandhi one evening. Old Gitanjali members still grow dewy-eyed recollecting that experience.

Due to ill health, mother had to stop all activities of Gitanjali for a long time. Then a few years ago, she suddenly decided to start it all over again. She called me one morning and much to my horror, she declared her intention in her usual manner, gently but firmly. I tried my best to dissuade her, thinking she might not be able to handle the stress of presenting a show. But her indomitable spirit prevailed over every obstacle. She called and gathered her old group members, got some new ones, scripted and directed a new production, booked an auditorium, got invitations sent out and presented the show perfectly to a full house.

I can only describe her and Gitanjali Troupe's journey by quoting a line from her favourite Rabindranath poem: *tomar pataka jare dao, tare bohibare dao shakti.*

(To the one you give your flag, may you also give him/ her strength to carry it.)

Gitanjali Troupe presented Bhanusingher Padaboli at the Rashtrapati Bhavan on 22 September 2013

BHANUSHINGHER PADABOLI

Written and composed by Rabindranath Tagore when he was just sixteen, Bhanusingher Padaboli or The Verses of Bhanu Singha, is a dance-drama that was inspired by the lyrical corpus of the Vaishnav Padaboli. Vaishnav Padaboli comprises songs by a host of Bhakti period saint-poets from Jayadeva and Vidyapati to, in a manner of speaking, Tagore himself when he assumes the pseudonym of Bhanu Singha and writes his songs not in native Bengali but in Brajbhasa, the dialect of Vrindavan and Mathura. In the Vaishnav tradition, love in its highest form is the eternal subject and its poems describe the yearning of the mortal soul (jeevatma) to unite with the immortal one (paramatma) through the allegory of the Radha-Krishna relationship. Tagore not only wrote the lyrics but also composed music for them. Suvra Mukherjee, artistic director of Gitanjali Troupe, has choreographed the dance-drama in the Rabindrik style using a fusion of classical and folk dances including odissi, manipuri and kathak. SK

FACING PAGE: The Hon'ble President Pranab Mukherjee with the members of the Gitanjali Troupe





KAPILA VENU: *The Rare Art of Kutiyattam*

Leela Venkataraman

Kapila Venu is one of just half-a-dozen artistes representing Kerala's ancient theatre art of the Nangiars – the Nangiar Koothu. Originally practiced in the temples of Kerala by the women of the Nambiar sect, a subcaste of the Chakyar community, which was the sole custodian of the rare Sanskrit theatre form of kutiyattam. The Nangiars are an unsung group who recited the verses of the Sri Krishna Parijatham and also played the female roles in kutiyattam. They also provided accompaniment on the cymbals called kuzhitalam. Kutiyattam is the sole surviving form of ancient Sanskrit theatre, and adheres to a highly conservative tradition performed only in certain temples of Kerala in a traditional performance space called the koothambalam, which is a

theatre built within the temple for staging such performances. It was only in the mid-1950s that kutiyattam was presented for the first time outside its temple setting.

Both Kapila's parents have been involved with the traditional arts of Kerala. Her mother, Nirmala Panikar, is a Mohiniattam dancer and her father, G. Venu, has been the force behind Natana Kairali, an organisation working for art forms facing extinction in the state. Since her childhood Kapila accompanied her parents to kutiyattam performances. Kutiyattam repertoire performs classical Sanskrit plays and has been the repository of the works of India's earliest playwright Bhasa (2nd century BC), presenting works like Svapnavasavadattam, Subhadra



Dhananjayan, Abhisekha Natakam and Ashokavanikangam. The actor, on entering the stage after concentrating on a flaming torch held before his eyes and paying obeisance to it, in a stylised sing-song recitation (set to a system of ragas special to this art form) utters the chosen Sanskrit verses before interpreting them through an elaborate language of gestures and facial expressions.

Kapila has imbibed in full measure the deep concentration demanded in kutiyattam, where the absence or presence of an audience makes little difference, for the dance is an offering to the nila-vilakku (the lit oil lamp on the front of the stage), which is held as the living presence of

the divinity. Seated on a stool most of the time, with minimal coverage of the floor space through movement, all action is restricted to a small area, within which the three worlds of heaven, earth and the underworld are recreated only through the magic of stylised mime and hand gestures.

Kapila was exposed early in life to the austere training and ambience of a Chakyar Madhom, the traditional home-school of a kutiyattam master, thanks to her father who had close contact with kutiyattam masters like Painkulam Rama Chakyar, Mani Madhava Chakyar and Ammanur Madhava Chakyar. Kapila's training under a genius like Ammannur Madhava Chakyar

has given her art a high quality of inner stillness, crucial for an art form which is very slow in its pace. So precocious was her talent that Kapila, when she was barely five years old, performed at the Narayana Gokulam in Ooty.

The highly internalised strength of mimetic communication involves mastering of special breathing techniques developed by the Kodungallur tradition of Kunhunni Tampuran, the last of the royal princes who had delved deep into the science of breathing as a yoga sadhana. The kutiyattam actor performs holding the basic standing position with a sideways deflection of the knees, with the breath concentrated in the region of the base of the spinal column. The elbows are brought on a level with the shoulders and all hand

gestures are performed at chest level. The other unique feature is the drumming on the mizhavu, a copper kettle-drum, the main musical instrument used in the form. With the two percussionists seated at the back of the performer, the uncanny understanding between actor and drummers is nothing short of amazing. The playing of the mizhavu provides the main pulse for the performance, the mood ascending to a climax before descending to a contrasting quietude.

After Ammannur Madhava Chakyar started performing outside the temple space in India and abroad, knowledge of his genius and about the rare theatre form of kutiyattam began to spread. In 1995, the Central Sangeet Natak Akademi organised a special kutiyattam festival



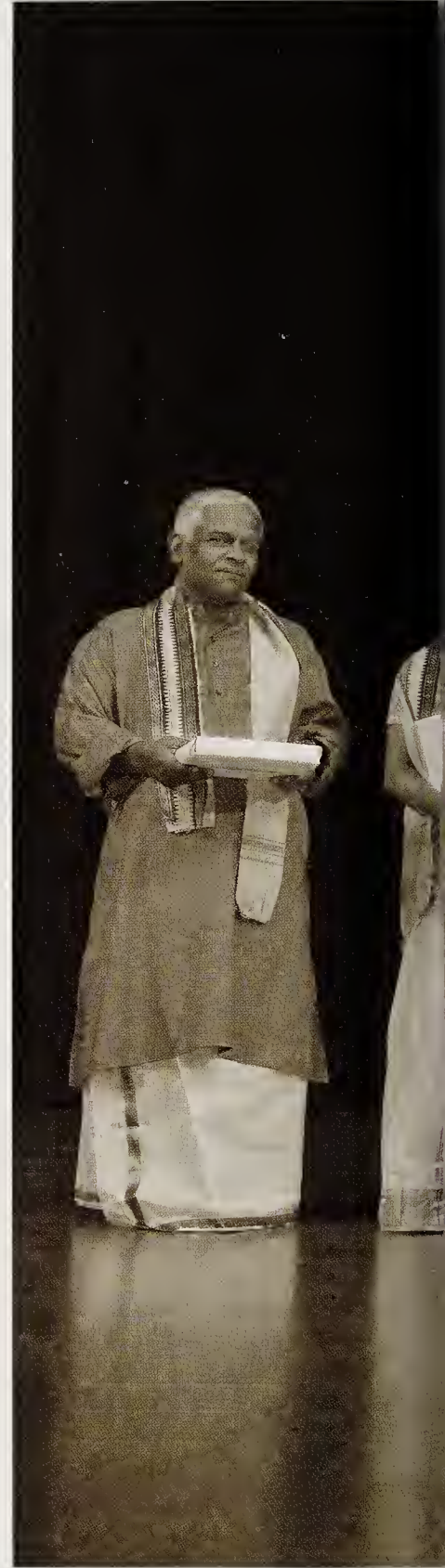
with a specially created Kerala-type stage in Delhi. Finally, on July 2001 (when Ammannur turned 84), came UNESCO's recognition of kutiyattam as a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity.

The next year Kapila's enactment as the heroine in Kalidasa's *Shakuntalam*, a 20th century addition to the kutiyattam repertoire (under the direction of Ammannur Madhava Chakyar), was highly acclaimed. Kapila's own creation *Sitaparityagam*, based on verses from Kalidasa's *Raghuvamsam*, narrates an episode from the Ramayana when Lakshmana, under instructions of Rama, leaves a pregnant Sita to fend for herself in the forest. Using kutiyattam devices like *prakaranatyam* (one actor taking on various roles in the narrative) and *nirvahanam* (flashback – reminiscing on past episodes), the work becomes a statement on a woman's honour. Sita's outrage at the treatment meted out to her and her disappearance into the bowels of the earth rather than succumb to another fire ordeal before joining her husband, and finally Rama's futile entreaties plus commands to Bhumi Devi that she release to him his lawfully wedded wife, were all powerfully depicted.

With Kapila one can feel assured that this centuries old tradition of Sanskrit theatre has found a worthy practitioner who will ensure its continuity and presence in modern times.

Kapila Venu's kutiyattam performance was held at Rashtrapati Bhavan on 19 October 2013.

FACING PAGE: The Hon'ble President Pranab Mukherjee with Kapila Venu and her troupe





VISVA PARICHAY:

Poetics of Science

Shambwaditya Ghosh

'I am not a scientist, but from childhood my strong desire to enjoy the rasa of science knew no bounds...' Rabindranath Tagore, Visva Parichay

Visva Parichay to God Particle, an unusual multimedia presentation that uses music, dance, recitation and slide projection, has been conceptualised and conducted by Sushanta Dattagupta, Vice-Chancellor, Visva Bharati University, along with Sangit Bhavana, Santiniketan, to illustrate Rabindranath Tagore's idea of Universalism while relating it to quantum physics.

Rabindranath Tagore's text, Visva Parichay, published in 1937, is dedicated to the renowned scientist, Satyendranath Bose. This is noteworthy since, here, Gurudev, who is known as a poet to the world, delves into the complexities of science. In the preface to his book, he writes about his fascination for science since his childhood. He recalls that he was mesmerised by his science teacher, Sitanath Datta, who introduced him to the processes of science.

While he was with his father, Maharshi Debendranath Tagore, on a trip to Dalhousie, young Rabindranath learnt about the constellation and astronomy. His father's Brahmo Samaj beliefs opened up the world of the Upanishads which led him to comprehend the philosophy of Universalism. When he set up Visva Bharati, Tagore introduced an



unconventional system of education where students could explore nature and interact with the Universe under open skies. He emphasised the role of arts and music in education to develop a child's mind. Here students were encouraged to understand the composition of vishva—the universe—through music and art.

It is, therefore, not surprising that the faculty and students of Sangit Bhavana could sing and perform a whole repertoire of Rabindrik songs and dances that a scientist like Professor Dattagupta could relate to the modern discoveries in quantum physics like the God Particle. It was interesting to note that the styling, costumes and ornaments used by the performers were once designed by the master artist, Nandalal Bose. The musical instruments used were also quite typical comprising esraj, khol, mandira and pakhawaj.

The songs chosen were mainly from the Biehitra Parjaya, the section of the Gitabitan collection relating to mysteries of nature and the cosmos. Through these songs, Tagore explored the creation and composition of the Universe. His unending sense of wonder is reflected in his song, 'Mahabishwe Mahakashe Mahakalo Majhe' that was sung in chorus and speaks about the Universal Self that resides in the Great Void of space and time. His search for this relationship is repeatedly stated in his all time favourite compositions like 'Amar

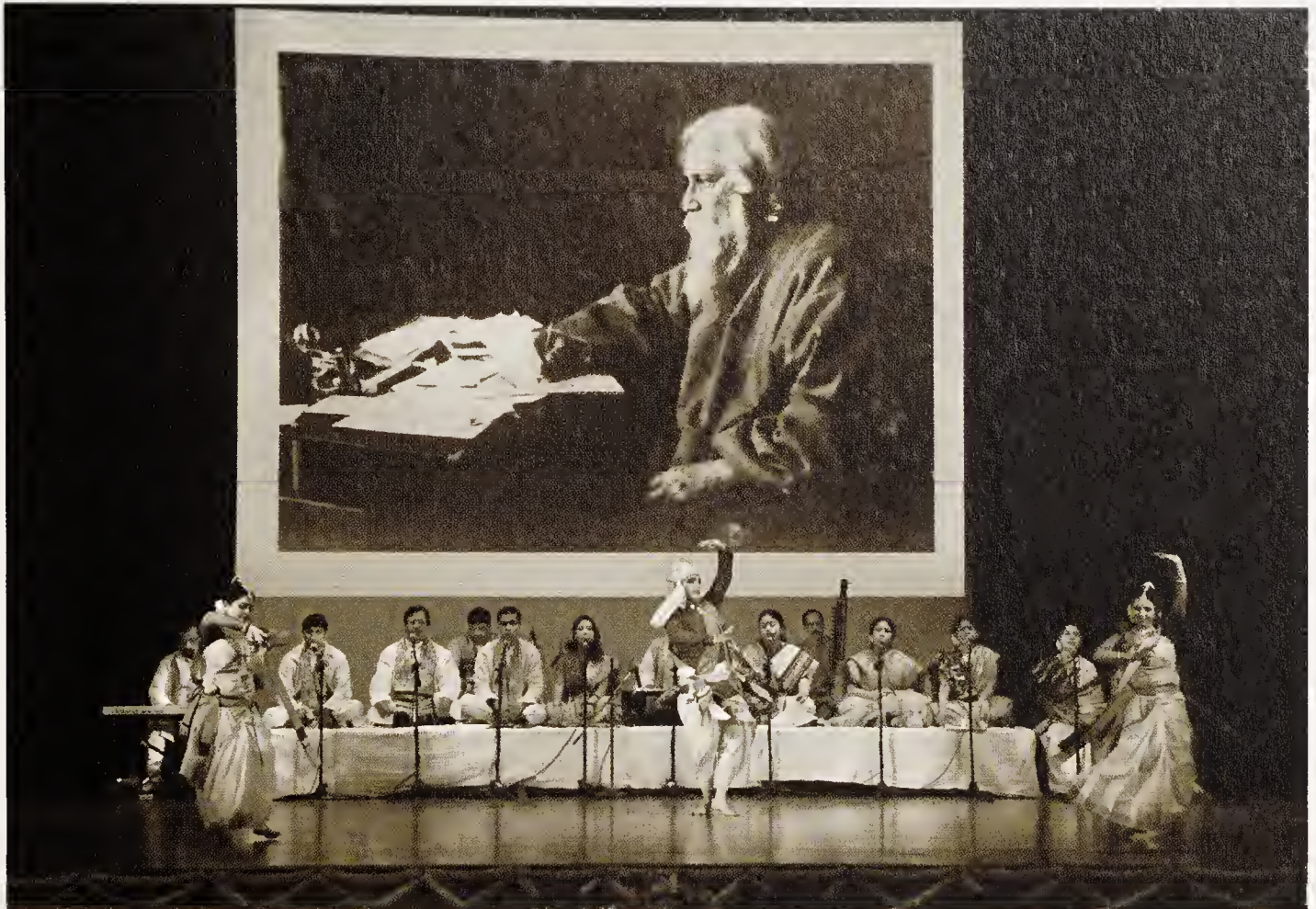
Mukti Aloy Aloy', 'Shimar Majhe Ashim Tumi', 'Bahe Nirantara Ananto Anando Dhara'. Tagore talks about the idea of symmetry in nature and the breaking of it in his Visva Parichay. The song, 'Dui Hate Kaler Mandira Je Sadai Baje', talks about this equilibrium between the notion of the divine and science

In his conversations with Albert Einstein in Berlin in 1930, Tagore had argued in favour of the divine intervention in comprehending the Universe. At the twilight of his life, several scientific discoveries in physics triggered him to compose the songs on the movement of the cosmos. There he compares the creation and destruction of the Universe with the dance of Nataraja. In his song, 'Nrityer Tale Tale He Nataraj', he says that divine intervention causes creation and destruction. This number was performed by the Sangit Bhavana students in the Rabindra Nritya style which synthesises movements from kathakali, manipuri and Bengali folk forms.

An enchanting evening of music and dance juxtaposed with science and performed in the authentic Rabindrik mode.

Visva Parichay was performed at the Rashtrapati Bhavan on 24 January 2014

FACING PAGE: The Hon'ble President Pranab Mukherjee with the Visva Bharati troupe





CINEMA

INDIAN CINEMA:

A Fantastic Reality

Saibal Chatterjee

Small-town mafia don Ramadhir Singh, a pivotal character in Anurag Kashyap's *Gangs of Wasseypur*, has no love lost for cinema. He believes he is still alive unlike many of his underworld foes because he does not watch movies. 'As long as there is cinema, people will continue to be taken for a ride,' he asserts. Ramadhir obviously has only one kind of film in mind: the kind that the average Indian movie fan can kill – and die – for. But that certainly isn't all there is to Indian cinema.

Coincidentally, Ramadhir Singh is played by Tigraanshu Dhulia, director of the National Award-winning *Paan Singh Tomar*, the exact antithesis of the sort of Hindi movie the fictional gangster scoffs at. The gritty *Paan Singh Tomar* brought audiences face-to-face with the tragic circumstances in which a real-life athletics champion turned into an outlaw in the early 1980s.

Such films, variously tagged as parallel, middle-of-the-road, socially meaningful and new-age (the label changes, the spirit remains the same), have existed ever since Baburao Painter made the silent *Savkari Pash* in 1925, with a twenty-four-year-old V Shantaram playing a farmer duped of his land by an avaricious moneylender and forced to relocate to a big city in search of a job.



Nargis and Raj Kapoor in Shree 420 (1955) epitomised the romance of the Nehruvian era

Cinema has been around in this country for one hundred years and a bit and what a rollercoaster 'ride' its eventful history has been!

In the early post-Independence years, Indian cinema, despite its share of ups and downs, grew steadily, aided by an enthusiastic paying public that had taken a shine to its entertaining, emotionally engaging and eventually comforting stories. Amid the turmoil of Partition and the deleterious legacy of the Second World War years, the Indian movie industry went for broke and, in the process, consolidated its sway over the masses by perfecting its crowd-pleasing, song-and-dance formula. Indian cinema has undergone many significant changes over the decades, but the dominant narrative template has remained pretty much the same.

Popular Indian films swing from one extreme to another: from delectably heart-warming to unabashedly escapist; from impressively ambitious to embarrassingly egregious; from deeply rooted to utterly fluffy. But no matter what, these films, with their many inducements – visual, visceral and emotional – never fail to hold the nation in thrall. For the masses, India's annual cinematic output, which now adds up to a thousand-plus titles in a multiplicity of languages, is both helium shot and palliative. Films in Tamil,

Telugu and Hindi lead the way in giving the masses value for money.

These films thrive principally on constructing dreamscapes in which every little sorrow miraculously makes way for an abundance of joy and every obstacle in life is magically transformed into a stairway to the heavens. The more discerning among Indian moviegoers tend to dismiss this narrative template as overly shallow. Their disdain for commercial Indian cinema sums up the duality of the nation's unique relationship with its mainstream cinema, the star-driven extravaganzas that spin multihued yarns for easy-to-please segments of the audience.

Hindi cinema's male-dominated star system has reflected the evolution of the nation-state. In the 1950s and part of the 60s, Dilip Kumar was the pensive, purposeful Nehruvian hero, Dev Anand, the cocky and charming sophisticate finding his way in a free country, and Raj Kapoor, the simple Everyman endowed with an innate instinct for survival. In the second half of the 1960s, a rakish and rebellious Shammi Kapoor emerged on the scene, catapulting Hindi cinema into a more boisterous era and opening the floodgates for the male superstars of the future – the romantic Rajesh Khanna, the angry Amitabh Bachchan, the charismatic Shahrukh Khan and the meticulous Aamir Khan and beyond – who defined the contours of Mumbai cinema.

At the other end of the spectrum, visionary moviemakers have, within the parameters of commercial cinema and outside it, crafted masterpieces that have stood the test of time. Non-mainstream films in various Indian languages adopt a realistic narrative mode and an original cinematic aesthetic. They serve as chronicles of India's complex socio-political realities.

Chetan Anand's *Neecha Nagar*, adapted in the mid-1940s from Maxim Gorky's *The Lower Depths*, underscored the divide between the haves and the have-nots. Khwaja Ahmed Abbas' *Dharti Ke Lal*, made in the same year, 1946, pioneered a 'realist' trend in Hindi cinema that famously culminated in Bimal Roy's *Do Bigha Zameen* (1953). These early specimens of socially relevant Hindi cinema continue to directly and indirectly inspire young filmmakers around the country. Iconic directors like V Shantaram, Bimal Roy, Raj Kapoor and Guru Dutt worked within the mainstream film industry but followed their own creative instincts.

Two important developments in 1960 changed the face of Indian cinema forever. The Film Finance Corporation (later renamed the National Film Development Corporation) and the Film and Television Institute of India (FTII) were set up by the Government of India on the recommendation of the SK Patil Film Enquiry Committee, which had submitted its report way back in 1951. FFC/NFDC

loans and funds made some of the most lauded Indian films possible. The list includes titles like Satyajit Ray's *Ghare Baire*, Shyam Bengal's *Suraj Ka Satvan Ghoda*, Kundan Shah's *Jaane Bhi Do Yaaron*, Mani Kaul's *Nazar*, Mrinal Sen's *Ek Din Achanak*, Shaji N Karun's *Piravi*, Goutam Ghose's *Autarjali Yatra*, Aparna Sen's *36 Chowringhee Lane*, Prakash Jha's *Danul*, Sudhir Mishra's *Main Zinda Hoon* and Ketan Mehta's *Mirch Masala*.

Ritwik Ghatak joined FTH as a professor of Film and Vice-Principal (1966-67) and inspired a band of men who went on to

put an exciting new spin on Indian cinema filmmakers like Adoor Gopalakrishnan, Mani Kaul and Kumar Shahani and cinematographer KK Mahajan.

Just as significantly, in 1955, Satyajit Ray's debut film, *Pather Panchali*, transported Indian cinema from 'unreal' studio sets to real locations. With Subrata Mitra cranking a camera yanked away from the tripod, a new way of 'seeing' the nation emerged and Indian films of a different mettle began to find global recognition at big international film festivals. In 1957, Mehboob Khan's *Mother India*, a



Satyajit Ray's eternal classic Pather Panchali (1955) ushered in a new realism in Indian cinema

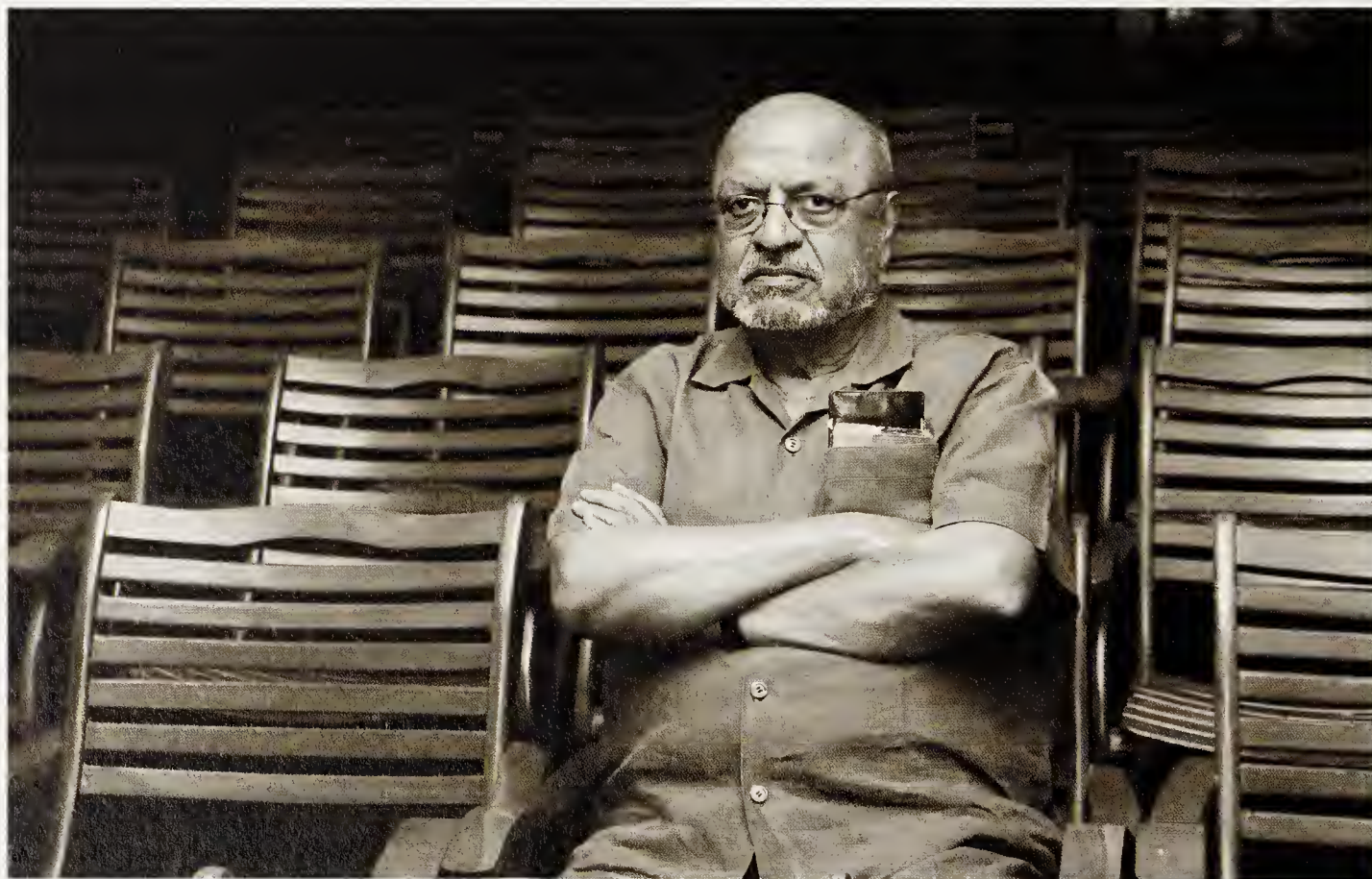
cinematic epic that emerged from the mainstream industry but eschewed many of the conventions of popular storytelling, became the first Indian feature to bag an Oscar nomination.

The non-formulaic approach to the craft of filmmaking found new expression in the 1970s and 80s in the works of Shyam Benegal (*Ankur*, *Nishant*, *Manthan*, *Bhumika*), Govind Nihalani (*Aakrosh*, *Ardh Satya*), Saeed Akhtar Mirza (*Albert Pinto Ko Gussa Kyon Aata Hai*, *Arvind Desai Ki Ajeeb Dastaan*, *Salim Langde Pe Mat Ro*), Ketan Mehta (*Mirch Masala*) and MS Sathyu (*Garam Hawa*). In subsequent decades, the likes of Sudhir Mishra, Prakash Jha,

Vishal Bhardwaj, Anurag Kashyap and Dibakar Banerjee, to name only a few, have used the medium, each in his own particular way, to put forth their vision of the society and the nation that they live in through stories set in real milieus.

The art versus commerce divide is nearly as old as Indian cinema itself. The debate may have changed in form and substance since Independence, but the stark line separating 'sheer entertainment' from 'meaningful cinema' has remained constant. Some films make pots of money, other make a whole lot of sense. Both endure.

Commercial movies are today increasingly



Shyam Benegal's woman-centric films dealt with social issues in rural and urban India

assessed not on the basis of what they have to say but on the strength of how much money they make. The suggestion is that if a big-banner film does not rake in Rs 100 crore and more at the box office, it isn't worth talking about. But mercifully, the Anurag Kashyaps and Dibakar Banerjees have other ideas. It really has been one long continuum. The fate that befell the farmer in *Sarkari Pash* was no different from the misfortunes faced by the hapless peasant in *Do Bigha Zameen* or the impoverished tiller in Anusha Rizvi's *Peepli Live* (2010), a stinging satire on India's ever-worsening agrarian crisis.

In Hindi, the parallel cinema movement was kicked off by Mrinal Sen's *Bhuvan Shome* and Mani Kaul's *Uski Roti* back in 1969. Bengal has had a tradition of artistically relevant cinema since much earlier, thanks to the works of Satyajit Ray, Ritwik Ghatak, Mrinal Sen and a host of other directors that followed the masters into the profession (Goutam Ghose, Buddhadeb Dasgupta, Aparna Sen, Rituparno Ghosh).

Malayalam cinema, too, has benefited from the works of men like Ramu Kariat (*Chemmeen*), Adoor Gopalakrishnan (*Swayamvaram*, *Elippathayam*, *Mukhamukham*), Shaji N. Karun (*Piravi*) and G. Aravindan (*Uttarayanam*, *Thampu*, *Chidambaram*). BV Karanth (*Chounana Dudi*), Pattabhirama Reddy (*Samskara*), Girish Karnad (*Vamsha Vrisksha*, *Kaadu*) and Girish Kasaravalli (*Ghatashraddha*) gave New Kannada

Cinema the big breakthroughs. Aribam Syam Sharma in Manipur and Jahnu Barua and the late Bhabendranath Saikia in Assam, among others, have also left an indelible imprint on the cinema of a star-struck and entertainment-obsessed nation that has not quite given these filmmakers their due.

But no assessment of what Indian cinema has achieved in terms of giving voice to the hopes and aspirations of the nation could be deemed complete without recognising the diverse cultural nuances that the pathbreakers and mavericks of the non-mainstream space have brought to our movies.

LINCOLN:

Heroic yet Human

Saibal Chatterjee

Arguably the most ambitious and precise Lincoln biopic ever made, Steven Spielberg's captivating take on the last four months of the tenure of America's sixteenth and most hallowed president yields storytelling at its finest. *Lincoln*, scripted by playwright Tony Kushner, is a complex, austere tale drawn from the pages of American history, but it is crafted in a manner that is deeply affecting and highly entertaining. Buoyed by masterly narrative sleights, Spielberg's history lesson is anything but dreary.

Lincoln is a lively story crammed with finely etched characters, enlivened with doses of humour and tension, and informed with dignity and restraint. The film is an adaptation of a single chapter

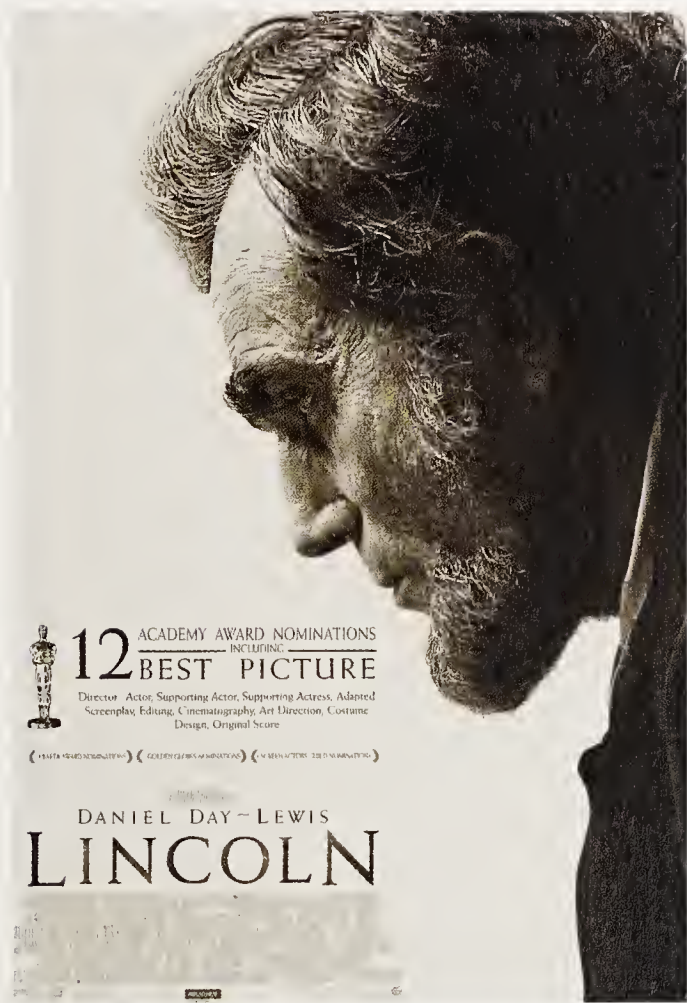
in Doris Kearns Goodwin's monumental tome, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*.

It is an engrossing political drama that centres on the passing of the 13th Amendment and the consequent end of the Civil War. *Lincoln* focuses on all the frantic political wrangling that went into the Amendment and the crucial role that the then US president played in steering it through the House of Representatives with a view to outlawing slavery and uniting the nation.

Lincoln is an outstanding film because it takes the generalities of history and turns them into elements of a compelling story. The experiment works primarily because

what it results in remains accessible all the way through. The film is structured in a manner that ensures that it can be enjoyed even if a viewer is unable to get either the subtle political allusions to the past or the informed parallels that are drawn with current-day 'wheeling and dealing' in Washington.

As is the case with all great filmed biographies, *Lincoln* does not seek to



project its protagonist as an infallible saint incapable of a little manipulation here and there in order to have his way when things threaten to veer out of control. So what we get is an impressive screen character, a real man of extraordinary

acumen and foresight, an exceptional individual capable of seeing the interests of the nation and its people with absolute clarity and acting upon the need of the hour. In Spielberg's vision, Lincoln is a heroic figure all right, but he is always demonstrably human.

Daniel Day-Lewis, in the role of Abraham Lincoln, never ceases to be breathtaking, such is the control and power of his performance. An exceptionally gifted and selective actor who has been surprising moviegoers with the wondrous ways in which he gets into the skin of the movie characters he plays, Lewis stamps his authority on this role as well without ever letting his presence overshadow the demands of the drama. He does not merely play Lincoln. He is Lincoln.

Sally Field is no less vivid and memorable in the role of Mary Todd Lincoln. In lesser hands, Lincoln could have become a stuffy, ponderous period piece. Spielberg raises the story to a plane where dramatic acuity and historical detailing work in tandem to create a soul-stirring, multilayered and warm film.

Lincoln is a dazzling cinematic achievement – a rewarding film that brings alive an era gone by and makes it relevant for our times.

Lincoln was screened at the Rashtrapati Bhavan on 9 November 2012



MANDELA – LONG WALK TO FREEDOM:

Cinematic Epic

Saibal Chatterjee

A two-and-a-half-hour film is hardly enough to hold the entire story of a life as eventful as Nelson Mandela's. *Mandela – Long Walk to Freedom*, adapted from the iconic anti-apartheid leader's autobiography, has passages that seem somewhat rushed, if not incomplete.

But that inevitable lacuna notwithstanding, director Justin Chadwick and screenwriter William Nicholson do a laudable job of bringing Mandela's illustrious journey to the big screen. While their focus is squarely on the specific flashpoints of the Mandela story, they do not miss out on the big picture. *Mandela – Long Walk*

to Freedom gets its biggest fillip from the measured star turn by British actor, Idris Elba.

Elba brings a mix of sustained intensity and controlled flamboyance to bear upon his illuminating interpretation of one of the world's most revered political and moral leaders. Admittedly, Elba does not bear much resemblance to Mandela – the former is decidedly bulkier – but that does not dilute the impact of either the performance or the film in any way. The actor not only nails the diction of the historical figure to perfection, he also uses his piercing, expressive eyes to illustrate, to an impressive degree, the thought

processes that helped Mandela sustain himself through a fierce, often violent, struggle for racial equality.

Mandela – Long Walk to Freedom is a sweeping cinematic epic that, right at the heart of the narrative, addresses the moral question over the inevitability of violence in a movement of the kind that Mandela led. It chronicles the leader's life from his days as a boy in a Xhosa village to his momentous inauguration as South Africa's first-ever democratically elected president in the mid-1990s.

As the film opens, we see the protagonist as a teenager engaged in a ritual initiation into manhood. It is a starting point that provides an indicative summation of all the daunting challenges that he is destined to encounter in the difficult years ahead. Mandela's was obviously no ordinary journey, yet the film presents an essentially human portrait of a great man endowed with reserves of incredible moral strength, but not entirely free of personal flaws.

His first wife, Evelyn, walks out on him in protest against his infidelity. Mandela then meets his would-be second wife and firebrand co-activist, Winnie Madikizela (played admirably well by Naomie Harris), and woos her. It is a relationship that lasted nearly four decades despite many ups and downs caused by their sharp differences over the direction the anti-

apartheid movement should take.

From a hotshot lawyer and amateur boxer, Mandela graduates to a position of leadership of a mass movement that poses a grave threat to an oppressive regime. The scenes of street violence are all too brief, but they are harrowing enough to underscore the magnitude of the battle that Mandela and his followers must fight.

A small portion of the film is devoted to the twenty-seven years that Mandela spent in a prison on an island off Cape Town. Far greater emphasis is laid on the negotiations that he conducted after his release. This film is as comprehensive a portrayal of Mandela's amazing life and work as is possible in a movie made primarily for mass consumption.

Mandela – Long Walk to Freedom was screened at the Rashtrapati Bhavan on 1 February 2012





EVENTS CALENDAR

INDRA DHANUSH EVENTS CALENDAR

MUSIC

09.02.2014

Sitar concert by Shahid Parvez Khan

15.12.2013

Performance by Shillong Chamber Choir

24.08.2013

Santoor concert by Shiv Kumar Sharma

27.07.2013

Concert by Abdul Rashid Khan

22.06.2013

Concert by Ao Naga Choir

27.04.2013

Mono-act Swami Vivekananda by Shekhar Sen

18.04.2013

Concerts by Bhuvanesh Komkali (Hindustani) and Aruna Sairam (Carnatic)

31.03.2013

Concert by Girija Devi

13.01.2013

Qawwali concert by Warsi Brothers

15.12.2012

Concert by Ao Naga Choir

24.11.2012

Flute concert by Hariprasad Chaurasia

22.09.2012

Concert by Shubha Mudgal

DANCE

24.01.2014

Performance by the faculty and students of Sangit Bhavana, Visva Bharati

19.10.2013

Kutiyattam performance by Kapila Venu

22.09.2013

Performance of Bhanusingher Padaboli by Gitanjali Troupe

25.05.2013

Karna, ballet by Shriram Bharatiya Kala Kendra

16.02.2013

Odissi dance by Madhvi Mudgal

13.10.2012

Shri Ram, dance-drama by Shriram Bharatiya Kala Kendra

CINEMA

01.02.2014

Screening of *Mandela - Long Walk to Freedom*

09.11.2012

Screening of *Lincoln*

CONTRIBUTORS:

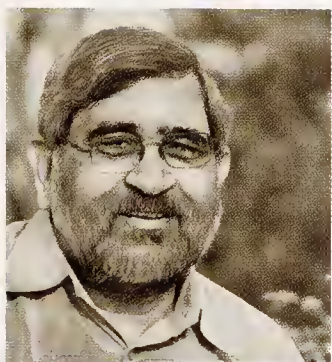


OMITA PAUL is Secretary to the President and heads the Rashtrapati Bhavan secretariat. A distinguished administrator, she has worked in key positions in the ministries of External Affairs, Commerce, Finance, Defence and Information and Broadcasting. Her published works include: *Corporate Soul - Dynamics of Effective Management* (co-author), *Work Culture in India* (ed.), and *Executive Motivation and Human Resource Planning in Airlines - an Asian Experience* (ed.).

SIDDHARTH SHARMA is Internal Financial Advisor, Rashtrapati Bhavan. Apart from his core competence in finance, he also oversees cultural and welfare activities in Rashtrapati Bhavan. A career civil servant, he has held key assignments in various ministries and departments, including the ministries of External Affairs, Urban Development and Finance, over the past two decades. He is also an avid debater and public speaker.

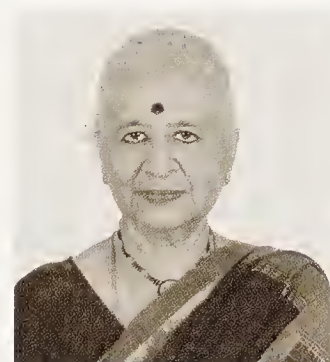


S KALIDAS trained in Hindustani music under Ustad Amjad Ali Khan and Pandit Mallikarjun Mansur. He has been a senior editor with *The Times of India*, *India Today*, *The Pioneer*, and was Group Executive Editor for *Swagat* and *Discover India*. He has scripted and directed *Hai Akhtri* a documentary on Begum Akhtar, and was advisor for *Rasa Yatra*, a 35min-film on Mallikarjun Mansur that won the Golden Lotus at the National Film Awards. His publications include *J. Swaminathan: Transits of a Wholetime*; *Pandit Mallikarjun Mansur Centenary Volume*, *Begum Akhtar: Love's Own Voice* and *Of Capacities and Containment: Poetry and Politics in the Art of Subodh Gupta*.



KULDEEP KUMAR is a political journalist who also writes on literature and music. He has worked as a special correspondent with *The Sunday Observer* and *Sunday*; as coordinating editor with *The Sunday Times of India* and as associate editor with *The Pioneer*. Presently, he is a columnist with *The Hindu*, *Jansatta* and Detusche Welle's Hindi website. He also writes regularly on Hindustani classical music for *The Hindu* and reviews books for *Frontline* and *Seminar*. In January 2012, ITC-Music Forum, Mumbai, honoured him with the International Foundation for Fine Art's Award for promotion of music through media.

LEELA VENKATARAMAN has been writing extensively on dance for over three decades. She has been dance critic with the *National Herald*, *The Patriot* and *The Hindu*. She also does a Delhi Diary for *Nartanam* and is a correspondent for *SRUTI* magazine. She has travelled widely and participated in several dance seminars and events around the globe. Her publications include *Tradition to Transition*, *Step by Step Bharatanatyam*, *A Phenomenon called Birju Maharaj*, *Indian Classical Dances for Children*, *Classical Dance in India - From Renaissance to the Present*.



SHARMISTHA MUKHERJEE is a kathak dancer and choreographer of repute, having trained under the late Jaipur gharana maestro Pandit Durga Lal. She has performed extensively in India and abroad. Her choreographies are marked for exploring uncharted territories; she is thus constantly trying to expand the traditional boundaries of her practice. She has made a six-part television series on Indian dance called *Talmel*, and a film on contemporary dance in India called *Beyond Tradition*. She is a regular columnist on art for the *Sunday Standard Magazine* of the New Indian Express group.

SHAMBWADITYA GHOSH is a recipient of fellowships from the Charles Wallace India Trust and the Nehru Trust for Indian Collection at Victoria & Albert Museum for studying museum display techniques. During his fellowship tenure he developed an exhibition project on Mithra for the Museum of London. He was also selected for British Museum's International Training Programme. He studied Ancient Indian History and Archaeology from Visva Bharati, Santiniketan, followed by training in Archaeology from the Institute of Archaeology of the ASI. He worked as research coordinator with INTACH, Delhi, American Institute of Indian Studies, Gurgaon, and City Palace Museum, Jaipur.



SAIBAL CHATTERJEE has been an editor, screenwriter and a National Award-winning film critic. He has worked on the staff of leading Indian news publications like *The Telegraph*, *The Times of India*, *Outlook* and *The Hindustan Times*. His film reviews appear on www.ndtv.com. He has scripted three award-winning documentary films – *Dream of a Dark Night*, *Harvest of Grief* and *Dil Ki Basti Mein*, all directed by filmmaker Anwar Jamal. He was a key member of the editorial board of Encyclopaedia Britannica's *Encyclopaedia of Hindi Cinema*, published in 2003. He has written *Echoes* and *Eloquences*, a book on the life and work of poet-lyricist-filmmaker Gulzar. He co-edited *Bollywood Hollywood – The Politics of Crossover Films*.

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DINESH KHANNA

Page X

OLIVER SAURABH SINCLAIR

Pages XIII, XIV

RAGHAV PASRICHA

Page 26

AVINASH PASRICHA

Pages 31, 41, 48, 49, 50, 53, 58, 66, 69, 71, 79, 98, 99, 113, 115

DEVISSARO

Page 92

SHOBHA DEEPAK SINGH

Pages 93, 103

RPB PHOTO SECTION

Pages VIII-IX, XV, XV, 2, 4, 5, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 28, 29, 34, 36, 38, 40, 40, 43, 43, 46, 52, 56, 60, 64, 68, 71, 72, 74, 76, 78, 81, 96, 96, 100, 101, 105, 106, 106, 108, 110, 110, 112, 116, 118, 120, 122, 122

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SAIBAL DASGUPTA ARCHIVE

Pages 126, 128, 129

S. KALIDAS ARCHIVE

Pages 14, 15, 17, 19, 20, 21, 22, 86, 88, 89, 90

SHEKHAR SEN ARCHIVE

Page 61

RELIANCE PICTURES

Page 132

PVR CINEMAS

Pages 133, 136, 136



